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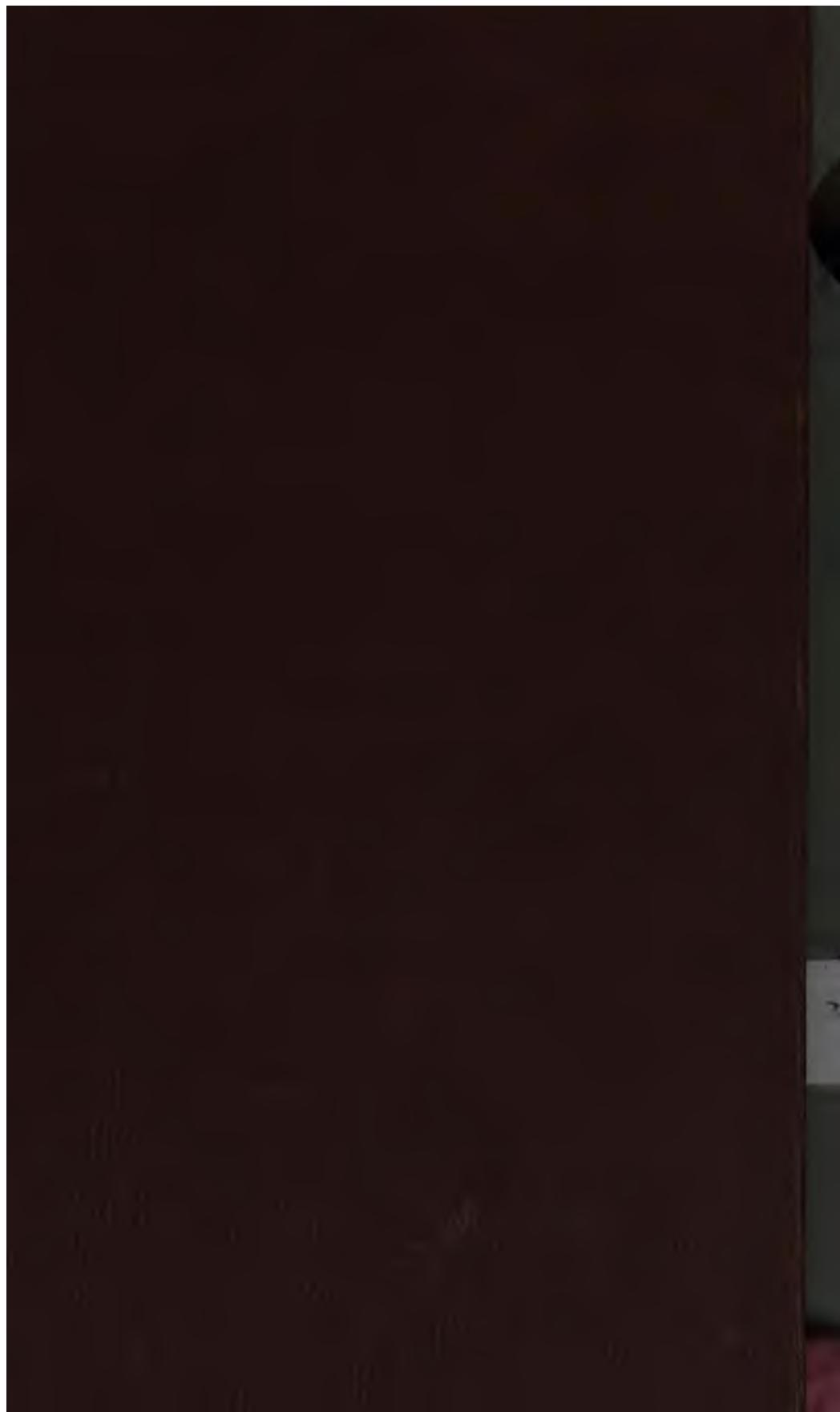
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LIBRARIAN OF HARVARD COLLEGE  
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**THE CORRESPONDENCE OF  
WILLIAM COWPER**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْكَوْثَرُ

©

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF  
**WILLIAM COWPER**  
ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL  
ORDER, WITH ANNOTATIONS

BY THOMAS WRIGHT

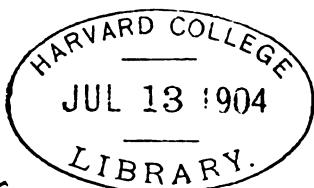
PRINCIPAL OF COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY  
AUTHOR OF 'THE LIFE OF WILLIAM COWPER,' ETC.

IN FOUR VOLUMES  
VOLUME I

LONDON  
**HODDER AND STOUGHTON**  
27 PATERNOSTER ROW  
MCMIV

184~~4~~5-36

1 A



Shakespeare fund.  
(1904)

Edinburgh : T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

•

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TO  
DR. WILLIAM ALDIS WRIGHT  
EDITOR OF  
THE CORRESPONDENCE OF ANOTHER  
GREAT ENGLISH LETTER-WRITER  
EDWARD FITZGERALD



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- Olney in the time of William Cowper.
- The Environs of Olney.
- The Grounds at Weston Underwood.

## P R E F A C E

WILLIAM COWPER is universally acknowledged to be the greatest of English letter-writers. How strange, therefore, that over one hundred years from the time of his death should have elapsed before a practically complete edition of his correspondence, arranged chronologically, with annotations, should be given to the world. In all, three bulky collections of Cowper's letters have hitherto been published, those of Hayley, Grimshawe, and Southey. Hayley, with the fear of Lady Hesketh before his eyes ; and Grimshawe, owing to pure incapacity either to understand Cowper or to produce a respectable work of any kind ; mutilated the letters mercilessly. Grimshawe, afraid, one would suppose, lest his readers should wreck their chances of future happiness by venturing on a smile, took peculiar delight in striking out the facetious passages—often requests for various small articles, or thanks for presents—which are among the best specimens of Cowper's playful humour. Our feelings, there-

fore, towards Hayley and Grimshawe are the reverse of kindly.

Southey, who went to work in a sensible and workmanlike way, did his best. But even his edition is extremely defective. In the first place, the so-called ‘private correspondence’ having been refused him, he was unable to keep to chronological order. His *Life and Works of William Cowper* originally occupied fourteen volumes, of which 1, 2, and part of 3 are taken up with the *Life* and quotations from the copyright letters, and the rest of 3 and 4, 5, 6, and 7 with the bulk of the correspondence. As soon as possible he added a fifteenth volume, consisting of the letters that had previously been denied him. The whole thing is therefore in a confused state.

In the second place, through his misfortune in not being able to see many of the originals, most of his letters are also mutilated, though not so badly as Grimshawe’s.

In the third place, numbers of letters have since been brought to light. Some have appeared in scarce books and forgotten periodicals, but many are unpublished. For ten years I have been collecting these scattered letters and arranging the whole series, and the result is now offered to the public.

This collection is considerably larger than either Southey's or Grimshawe's, but I do not style it, as Grimshawe did his, a 'complete edition' of the letters of William Cowper. There never will be a complete edition—to wit, a collection of all existing letters—for the simple reason that, human nature being what it is, there will always be a few collectors whose keenest joy is to hug something that has never been in print. Still I have been very successful. My inquiries in the press and among likely private persons resulted in large numbers of original letters being placed in my hands. Then, too, the originals in the British Museum, the Cowper Museum at Olney, and other public institutions have likewise been at my service. In every case in which I could get sight of the originals I have restored the excised passages, and have done my best to reduce to order the intolerable chaos.

Of entirely new letters, then, many will be found in these pages, including the three earliest known and a fine series to Mrs. Throckmorton. Seventy-two letters of Cowper to Teedon are referred to in Teedon's *Diary*, and I have the satisfaction of being able to say that not a single item of this series has escaped my net.

My annotations should be helpful.

The task has not been an easy one : when the originals were to hand all went gaily, but it was otherwise when Grimshawe had to be relied upon. That gentleman, for instance, not content with eliminating whole paragraphs, was actually rash enough to cut letters in two and serve them up as separate letters with different dates, or he would cut a piece off one letter and tag it on to another.<sup>1</sup> Difficulties in chronology certainly never gave him a sleepless night.

A few of the letters are undated, and in placing them I have, of course, had to exercise my judgment.

For the convenience of the reader a list is given showing not only the dates of the letters, but also the opening words ; and other helpful lists, and three genealogical tables will also be found. Lastly, there is a comprehensive index.

Some of the more famous letters have won to themselves special names. Thus we have—

- |                                     |   |                 |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| The 'Thresh his old Jacket' Letter, | . | 31st Oct. 1779. |
| The 'Runaway Hare' Letter,          | . | 21st Aug. 1780. |
| The 'Hop o' my Thumb' Letter,       | . | 12th July 1781. |
| The 'Kissing Candidate' Letter,     | . | 29th Mar. 1784. |

The poetical letters, without counting the ' Hop o' my Thumb ' jingle, are five in number, namely :—

<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, the possibility that either Lady Hesketh or Hayley was the sinner, and Grimshawe only the victim.

To Robert Lloyd,	.	.	.	1754.
„ Mrs. Newton,	.	.	.	16th Sept. 1781.
„ Bull,	.	.	.	22nd June 1782.
„ Lady Austen,	.	.	.	12th Aug. 1782.
„ Hill,	.	.	.	Nov. 1784.

The personality of William Cowper is better known than that of any other great English writer with the exception perhaps of Samuel Johnson. Cowper seems like a next-door neighbour—nay, even nearer—for these letters reveal, not merely his acts and surroundings, but the workings of his inmost mind. But if Cowper himself—the shy, lovable, self-torturing, playful, just, honourable, and warm-hearted poet—is the centre of this correspondence, how distinctly, too, stand out the other characters. They are drawn as sharply as the figures in a story by Hawthorne, or perhaps we should say Dickens—for there are so many of them. Yet—and let the fact never be lost sight of—the letters were not intended for publication. We have the quiet and devoted, and (may we add ?) pardonably jealous Mrs. Unwin; the beautiful, cultured, idealising, vivacious, and papilionaceous Lady Austen; the hearty, liberal, and affectionate Lady Hesketh—queen of kind cousins—good as she was buxom. *Aeneas* was accounted happy in that he had one faithful Achates; Cowper possessed

of the sterner sex alone at least five staunch friends, any one of whom would have hesitated at nothing to do him service—the earnest, amiable, and witty John Newton, the melancholic, pipe-loving William Bull, the sedulously attentive Rose, the volatile ‘Johnny of Norfolk,’ the effusive, grandiloquent, and good-natured Hayley—each with his idiosyncrasies, but all true as steel. Nor must we forget the ever invisible but continually devoted Theodora, the practical Joseph Hill, or the courtly ‘Frogs.’ The minor figures of the drama are scarcely less familiar to us: pretty, giddy, thoughtless, extravagant ‘Miss Hannah,’ Cowper’s protégée; poverty-pinched, verbose, devout, vaticinating Samuel Teedon—schoolmaster and Delphic oracle; carpenter-parson Tom Raban, sturdy and opinionative, with the noticeable negative virtue of not being intentionally uncivil; ‘Poor Jenny Raban,’ Tom’s afflicted daughter; ‘Royal Oak’-frequenting ‘Geary Ball,’ and ‘wrong-headed’ Nathan Sample.

A word or two about pronunciation may be acceptable. The poet and his friends always pronounced his name *Cooper*. Of this there is abundance of documentary evidence. *Cooper*, therefore, and not *Cowper*, is correct. As regards two other words of frequent occurrence in these

pages, Olney has the *o* long and the *l* silent, and rhymes with pony; Madan is pronounced *Madden*, with the accent on the first syllable. The references in this work are to

1. The Globe Edition of Cowper's *Poems* (Macmillan).
2. The *Unpublished and Uncollected Poems of William Cowper* (Fisher Unwin).
3. *The Life of William Cowper* (Thomas Wright, Olney).<sup>1</sup>
4. *The Town of Cowper* (Thomas Wright, Olney).<sup>1</sup>

Of the letters written to Cowper very few have been preserved. The following may be mentioned—

FROM.	DATE.	WHERE TO BE FOUND.
Mrs. Unwin,	1775 Aug. 21	Unpublished.
Rev. John Newton,	1767 July 30	Bull's <i>Letters by the Rev. John Newton</i> , published by Religious Tract Society.
<i>Id.</i>	1780	"
<i>Id.</i>	1780 Apl. 27	"
<i>Id.</i>	1780 May 6	"
<i>Id.</i>	1780 Sept. 30	"
<i>Id.</i>	1786 Mar. 11	"
Lord Thurlow,	1791	In this work.
<i>Id.</i>	1791	"
Thomas Hayley,	1793 Mar. 4	Southey's <i>Cowper</i> , vol. vii.
Joseph Bringhurst (of Philadelphia),	1796 April 3	p. 333. In the Cowper Museum, Olney.

One letter of Mrs. Unwin's is given in this work, namely, that to Mrs. Newton, 7th October 1778.

<sup>1</sup> Now obtainable only direct from the author, Olney.

In conclusion, I wish to express my sincere thanks to all persons who have helped me, and particularly the following :—

- Mr. Clement K. Shorter, editor of the *Sphere*.  
Mrs. Alfred Morrison, 26 Bruton Street, London, W.  
Miss Rowley, 4 Buckingham Vale, Clifton, Bristol (letter of 31st August 1789).  
Messrs. Sotheby, Wellington Street, Strand.  
Messrs. J. Pearson and Co., Pall Mall.  
Mr. F. Barker, 41 Gunterstone Road, West Kensington, W. (Letters to Toby).  
Miss A. K. Martyn, Old Crown Cottage, Chislehurst, Kent, who lent me 26 letters sent to Mrs. King.  
Mr. Arthur John King Martyn (Miss Martyn's brother).  
Mr. G. G. Napier Orchard, West Kilbride, N.B. (loan of letter October 20, 1781).  
Mr. L. Hainsworth, Oakwell Cottage, Farsley, Leeds (loan of letter 11th September 1788).  
Mr. Willmore, Queenwood College, Hants (3 letters).  
Mr. William Bolton, Rydal Villa, Elgin Road, Addiscombe.  
Mr. William Rowley, 56 Tressillian Road, Brockley, S.E.  
Mr. W. H. Collingridge, Enfield.  
Mr. H. Gough, Sandcroft, Red Hill.  
Mr. F. C. Carr Gomme, The Chase, Farnham Royal, Bucks.  
Mr. Ed. J. Collins, Clarence Street School, Bolton.  
Mr. Wm. Lowe Fleaming, Naisily Lodge, Wolverhampton.  
Mr. R. F. Sketchley, Librarian Dyce and Forster Libraries, South Kensington Museum.  
Mr. P. Curphey, 40 Derby Square, Douglas, Isle of Man.  
Rev. Geo. H. Culshaw, Iver Heath, Uxbridge.  
Mr. W. W. Manning, 21 Redcliff Gardens, South Kensington.

## PREFACE

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**Rev. W. Cowper Johnson, Yaxham Rectory, East Dereham.**

**Mrs. Salmon, 56 Bloomsbury Street, W.C.**

**Mr. Walter T. Spencer, Bookseller, 27 New Oxford Street, W.C.**

**Mr. William Brown, 26 Princes Street, Edinburgh.**

**Dr. J. Barker Smith, 4 Holmdene Avenue, Half Moon Lane, Dulwich, S.E.**

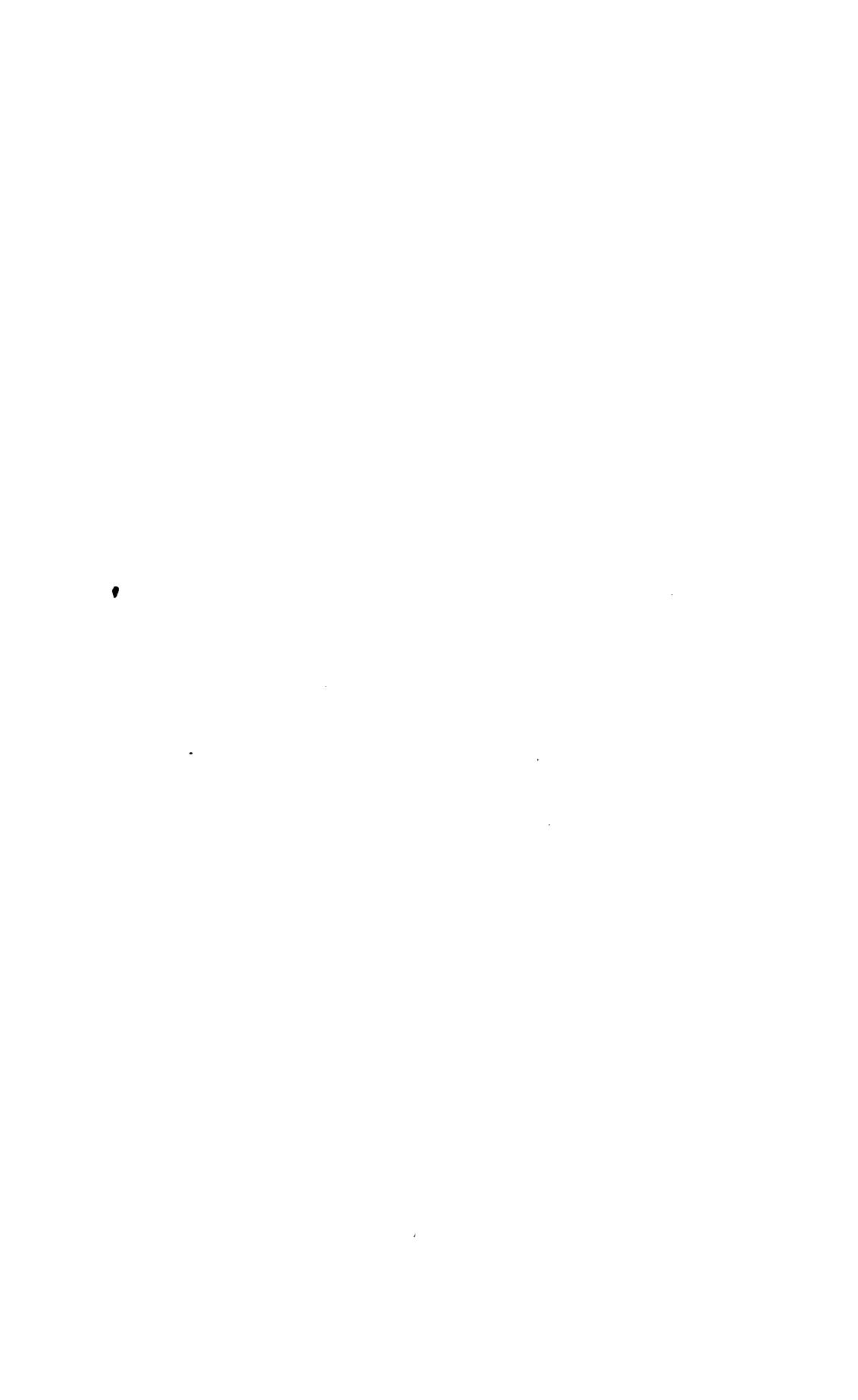
**Mr. W. J. Harvey, 'The Rectory,' Crystal Palace Road, London, S. E.**

**THOMAS WRIGHT.**

**COWPER SCHOOL, OLNEY, BUCKS.**

**VOL. I.**

*b*



## CORRESPONDENTS OF COWPER

**Bagot, Rev. Walter.** He and his four brothers had been schoolfellows of Cowper at Westminster.

**Balls, Mrs.** Cowper's Cousin Harriet, daughter of Rev. Roger Donne.

**Bodham, Mrs.** Cowper's Cousin Anne, daughter of Rev. Roger Donne. Cowper called her 'Rose.' It was she who sent the poet the miniature of his mother.

**Buchanan, Rev. John.** 'Buchy.' Curate of Weston Underwood.

**Bull, Rev. William.** Independent minister of Newport Pagnell. 'Smoke-inhaling Bull.' 'Dear Taureau.'

**Carwardine, Rev. Thomas,** of Earl's Coln Priory, near Halstead, Essex. Friend of Hayley. 'Carwardine the Generous.'

**Churche, Walter,** Attorney-at-Law, Hay, Brecon. 'A Welshman with a wife and many children.'

**Cogswell, Dr. James,** of New York.

**Colman, George ('The Elder').** Born 1733. Translator of *Terence*; writer of comedies.

**Courtenay, George.** Younger brother of Mr. (afterwards Sir John) Throckmorton, but had changed his name. Mrs. Courtenay was the 'Catharina' of Cowper's poems.

**Cowper, General.** Son of William Cowper, Clerk of the Parliaments. Cowper's first cousin.

**Cowper, Major,** of the Park, Hertford. Cowper's first cousin, Married Frances Maria Madan.

- Cowper, Mrs. Cowper's cousin Frances Maria, daughter of Mrs. Madan (Cowper's Aunt Judith).
- Greatheed, Rev. Samuel. Pastor of the Independent Church at Woburn. He lived at Newport Pagnell.
- Hayley, Tom. Hayley's son. 'Dear little Tom.'
- Hayley, William. Born in 1745. He wrote the first of the large biographies of Cowper. Died 1820. 'My dear brother.'
- Hesketh, Lady. 'Dear Cuzzy-Wuzzy.' Harriet, daughter of Mr. Ashley Cowper. The poet's first cousin. Married Sir Thomas Hesketh, who died in 1778. She died in 1807. Buried in Bristol Cathedral.
- Hill, Joseph. Cowper's friend and 'Chancellor of the Exchequer.' 'Joe,' 'Josephus,' 'Sephos.'
- Hill, Mrs. Wife of Joseph Hill.
- Hill, Rev. Rowland, the distinguished divine. 'The celebrated and original Mr. Rowley Hill'—John Newton.
- Hurdis, Rev. James. Rector of Bishopstone, Sussex, and Professor of Poetry at Oxford.
- Johnson, John (Johnny of Norfolk). Son of Cowper's cousin Catherine, and grandson of Rev. Roger Donne. He died in 1833. Buried at Yaxham, near East Dereham.
- King, Mrs. Wife of Rev. John King, Rector of Pertenhall, Beds.
- Madan, Mrs. As Judith Cowper, a famous Court beauty, remarkable for the loveliness of her neck; and the 'Erinna' of Pope, who would sit whole days before her portrait. She wrote poetry, one volume of which was edited by her illustrious nephew.
- Newton, Rev. John. Curate of Olney from 1764 to 1779. Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, London, 1779 to 1807. Buried at St. Mary Woolnoth's. His remains were removed to Olney in 1893.
- Park, Thomas, Author. Died in 1834.

## CORRESPONDENTS OF COWPER xxi

Phillips, Mr. R. Printer, of Leicester, afterwards knighted.  
Died 1840.

Polwhele, Rev. Richard. Historian and antiquary. See  
*Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xcv. pp. 140, 244, 343.

Powley, Rev. Matthew. Vicar of Dewsbury. He married  
Mrs. Unwin's daughter Susanna. He died in 1806, she  
in 1835.

Rose, Samuel. Son of Dr. William Rose, schoolmaster at  
Chiswick. The 'Couleur de Rose.'

Rose, Mrs. Wife of Samuel Rose.

Rowley, Clotworthy. Fellow Templar of Cowper's. Of  
Tendring Hall, near Stoke-by-Nayland, Essex.

Rye, Rev. J. Jekyll. 'Joe Rye.' Vicar of Dallington, near  
Northampton. Letters to Rye, 16th April 1792 and  
3rd November 1793.

Smith, Charlotte. Author. Cowper met her at Earham.  
She died in 1806.

Smith, Robert, afterwards Lord Carrington. Cowper was  
his almoner at Olney.

Teedon, Samuel. Schoolmaster at Olney. Writer of the  
famous *Teedon's Diary*, preserved in the Cowper Museum  
at Olney. He died in 1798.

Thornton, John. Cowper's 'John Thornton the Great.' A  
rich Turkey merchant. One of the Evangelical leaders.

Throckmorton, John (afterwards Sir John). Son of Sir  
Robert Throckmorton of Weston Underwood. On his  
father's death, in 1791, he succeeded to the baronetcy.  
Cowper playfully called him and his wife 'Mr. and  
Mrs. Frog.'

Throckmorton, Mrs. (afterwards Lady). Wife of Mr. (Sir  
John) Throckmorton. She was daughter of Mr. Thomas  
Gifford of Chillington, Staffordshire.

Thurlow, Lord. Born 1732. Became Lord Chancellor and  
Baron Thurlow in 1778. Died in 1806.

Toby. Probably Clotworthy Rowley.

Unwin, Mrs. Cowper's great friend. 'My Mary.'

Unwin, Rev. William. Rector of Stock, Essex. He died  
in December 1786. Buried at Winchester. 'Amico  
mio.' 'Reverend and dear William.'

Unwin, John. Son of Rev. William Unwin.

Wright, Mr., 'at Mr. Pattison in Oxenden Street, near  
Ye Haymarket, London.' Probably a fellow-Templar  
of Cowper's.

## LIST OF ORIGINAL LETTERS IN THE PUBLIC MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

The following is the list of original letters of Cowper in our public museums and libraries:—

### BRITISH MUSEUM

(In the order in which they are there arranged.)

To *Hayley*. Addit. mss. 30,805.

1793. Mar. 19.

To *Rose*. Addit. mss. 21,556.

1791. Oct. 30.	1793. Jan. 9.
1792. Aug. 13.	“ Mar. 13.
“ Aug. 29.	“ Sept. 29.

To *Unwin*, with one to John Unwin and one to Lord Thurlow. 2 volumes.

Volume I.—46 letters.

1770. Mar. 31.	1780. Feb. 13.
1778. June 18.	“ Feb. 27.
“ July 18.	“ Mar. 28.
“ Dec. 3.	“ Apr. 6.
1779. May 1.	“ May 8.
“ July. ‘If you please.’	“ June 8.
“ July 17.	“ June 18.
“ Aug. 17.	“ June 22.
“ Sept. 21.	“ July 11.
“ Dec. 2.	“ July 27.

1780.	Sept. 3.	1781.	May 28.
"	Sept. 7.	"	June 5.
"	Sept. 17.	"	June 24.
"	Oct. 5.	"	July 29.
"	Nov. 9.	"	Aug. 25.
"	Dec. 24.	"	Sept. 26.
"	Dec. 'Poetical reports.'	"	Feb. 27.
1781.	Jan. 14.	"	Oct. 6.
"	Feb. 6.	"	Nov. 5.
"	Apr. 2.	"	Nov. 24.
"	May 1.	"	Nov. 26.
"	May 10.	"	'In a time of so much.'
"	May 23.	"	'The salmon.'

*Volume II.—67 letters.*

1782.	Jan. 5.	1782.	June 8.
"	Feb. 9.	"	Aug. 4.
"	'The modest terms.'	"	Sept. 7.
"	Feb. 24.	"	Nov. 10.
"	Feb. 25. (To Thurlow.)	"	'It is hard upon us strip- lings.'
"	Mar. 7.	"	Jan. 3.
"	'William for the sound's sake.'	"	Feb. 29.
"	Mar. 18.	"	Mar. 21.
"	Apr. 1.	"	Apr. 5.
"	Apr. 27.	"	Apr. 25.
"	May 27.	"	May 3.
"	June 12.	"	'We took leave of your sister.'
"	July 16.	"	July 3.
"	Aug. 3.	"	July 12.
"	Aug. 27.	1784.	Aug. 14.
"	Nov. 4.	"	Sept. 11.
"	Nov. 18.	"	Oct. 10.
"	Nov. 30.	"	Oct. 20.
"	'Dr. Beattie.'	"	Nov. 1.
"	Feb. 2.	"	Nov. 'The slice.'
"	Mar. 30.	"	Dec. 18.
"	May 12.		

## LIST OF ORIGINAL LETTERS xxv

<b>1784.</b>	Nov. 20.	1786.	Mar. 13.
<b>1785.</b>	Jan. 15.	"	July 3.
"	Feb. 7.	"	July 10.
"	Feb. 28.	"	Aug. 9.
"	Mar. 20.	"	Sept. 24.
"	Apr. 30.	1793.	Oct. 29. (To John Unwin, son of the Rev. W. Unwin.)
"	June 12.	1786.	'You are my mahogany box.'
"	July 27.	"	'You are sometimes.'
"	Aug. 27.	"	'I write under.'
"	Oct. 22.	"	'The fish happening.'
"	Nov. 28.		
"	Dec. 24.		
"	Dec. 31.		
<b>1786.</b>	Jan. 14.		

### COWPER MUSEUM, OLNEY

To *Lady Hesketh.*

**1793.** 'Having had my old friend.' Probably Mar.

**1788.** (Probably.) To *Rose* 'I send you a line or two.'

There are also many letters on loan.

### LITERARY INSTITUTE, BEDFORD

To *Bull.*

**1786.** Jan. 7.

### ROYAL MUSEUM, SALFORD

To *Teedon.*

**1793.** Aug. 10.

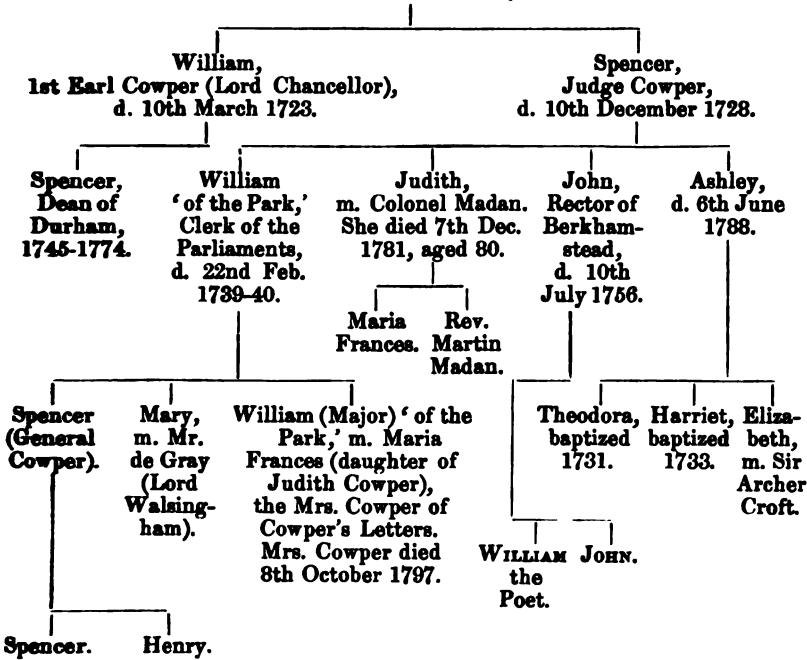
### SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM (Dyce and Foster Col.).

To *Rose.* 19th Feb. 1789.



## THE COWPER FAMILY

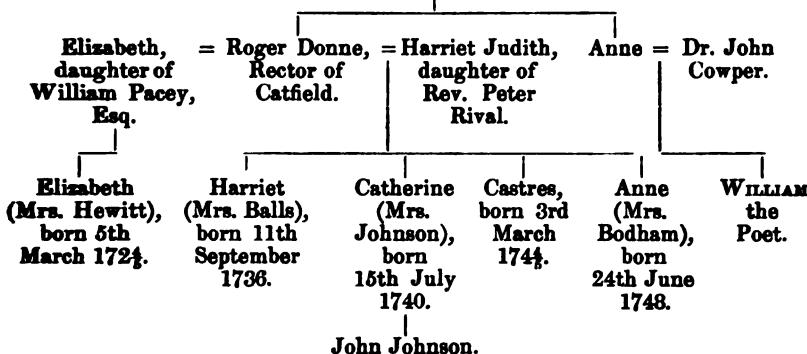
**SIR WILLIAM COWPER.**  
buried 2nd December 1706.





## THE DONNE FAMILY

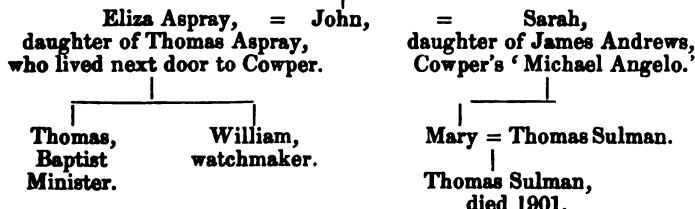
### ROGER DONNE.



## THE KILLINGWORTH FAMILY

Elizabeth Killingworth, 'Mammy' of Samuel Teedon of 'Cowper's Letters.'  
 'Teedon's Diary,' buried at Olney, 5th December 1807. Writer of 'Teedon's Diary,' buried at Olney, 9th June 1798.

Eusebius, the 'Mr. Killingworth' of 'Cowper's Letters,' and the 'Worthy' of 'Teedon's Diary,' buried at Olney, 24th February 1828. = Polly Taylor, 'Polly of the Diary,' married 18th April 1808. Buried at Olney, 19th November 1817.





## CHIEF EVENTS OF COWPER'S LIFE

- 1731. Nov. 26. Born at Great Berkhamstead.
- 1737. Feb. 13. Death of his mother.
- 1741. Enters Westminster School.
- 1748. Apr. 29. Entered at the Middle Temple.
- 1753. First Derangement.
- 1756. Aug. 3. Death of his father.
- 1762. July 31. Death of his stepmother, Mrs. Rebecca Cowper.
- 1763. Second Derangement. He is placed with Dr. Cotton at St. Albans.
- 1765. June 22. Settles at Huntingdon.
- 1767. Sept. 14. Settles at Olney.
- 1770. Mar. 20. Death of John Cowper.
- 1773. Jan. Third Derangement.
- 1779. Feb. 15. Olney Hymns published.
- 1780. Jan. Rev. John Newton leaves Olney.
- 1781. July. Introduction to Lady Austen.
- 1782. Mar. 1. First volume of Poems published.
- 1782. Nov. *John Gilpin* published anonymously.
- 1784. Spring. Final rupture with Lady Austen.
- 1785. June. *The Task* published.
- 1786. Nov. 15. Removes to Weston Underwood.

1786. Nov. 29. Death of William Unwin.  
• 1787. Fourth Derangement.  
1791. Translation of Homer published.  
1792. Aug. and Sept. At Earham.  
1794. July 5. Receives a pension of £300 a year from  
the Crown.  
1795. July. Is removed into Norfolk.  
1796. Dec. 17. Death of Mrs Unwin.  
1800. Apr. 25. Death.

## PRIME MINISTERS

(*This list is necessary in order to understand Cowper's political letters.*)

Lord North, . . . . .	Jan. 1770—Mar. 1782.
Marquis of Rockingham, . . . . .	Mar. 1782—July 1782.
Lord Shelburne, . . . . .	July 1782—Feb. 1783.
Duke of Portland, . . . . .	Apr. 1783—Dec. 1783.
William Pitt, . . . . .	Dec. 1783—Mar. 1801.

# THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM COWPER

## I. INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM COWPER, the beloved poet and the greatest of English letter writers, was born at the Rectory House of Great Berkhamstead on 26th November 1731, his father being the Reverend John Cowper, D.D., rector of the parish, and his mother, Anne, daughter of Roger Donne of Ludham Hall, Norfolk.

On November 7th, 1737, was born Cowper's brother John, the only child of Dr. Cowper, beside William, who grew to manhood. The mother died a few days later, at the early age of thirty-four. William was only six years old, yet such an impression had her affection and tenderness made on his mind that fifty years afterwards, on receiving her picture, he 'dwelt as fondly on the cherished features as if he had just mourned her death.' The touching poem 'On the receipt of my mother's picture out of Norfolk' is the most resplendent gem in Cowper's casket. Never through the lips of a mortal has sorrow spoken in more thrilling language.

Mrs. Cowper was buried at Berkhamstead, and, soon after, William was sent to a boarding school at Market Street in Bedfordshire, where his treatment by the elder boys was so cruel that he ever looked back on that period with horror.

He was removed on account of serious inflammation in his eyes, and placed under the care of Mr. Disney, an oculist; and at the age of ten, when sufficiently recovered, was entered at Westminster, where he became the school-fellow of Warren Hastings, Charles Churchill, and others who rose to fame.

He left school when about eighteen, and after spending nine months at Berkhamstead, was sent to acquire the practice of the law with Mr. Chapman, an attorney. But his time was occupied not so much at Mr. Chapman's as in Southampton Row, with his cousins, Theodora and Harriet (afterwards Lady Hesketh) where, as he himself tells us, he and his fellow-student, Thurlow, the future Lord Chancellor, were 'constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law.'

## II. AT THE TEMPLE

Having concluded the term of his engagement with Mr. Chapman, Cowper in 1752, at the age of twenty-one, settled himself as a regular student of law in chambers in the Middle Temple. Here he was seized with his First Derangement. His dejection was terrible. Day and night he was upon the rack, 'lying down in horror, and rising up in despair.' This state of mind continued for a twelvemonth, though he found some relief in reading George Herbert. Finally he betook himself to God in prayer, and He who does not break the bruised reed was graciously pleased to hearken.

About this time Cowper fell in love with his

cousin Theodora, a beautiful girl, who, as Lady Hesketh tells us, had the face and figure of a goddess.<sup>1</sup> Nineteen love poems, principally addressed to, or on the subject of, Theodora were published twenty-five years after Cowper's death.

Among Cowper's acquaintances at The Temple were Carr, Allston and Clotworthy Rowley. The earliest known letter of his is addressed to a Mr. Wright 'at Mr. Pattison in Oxenden Street, near Ye Hay-Market, London,' who may also have been a fellow Templar. It is written from Durham, Cowper possibly being on a visit to his kinsman the Dean.<sup>2</sup>

## TO MR. WRIGHT

*Durham, November 11, 1753.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I have just had your letter, for which I thank you. You talk of my removing to town. Alas! it will not be till after Christmas; and then how stale a subject of conversation will that be which I have put into your heads. Besides, I want your judgment of it before then for several reasons: one particularly, that my head may be quite rid of all parallaxes and equations for some time, and be fitted for more terrestrial employments;

<sup>1</sup> How came you to know, or rather to imagine, that our dear friend made use of the appellation of Thea when writing to my sister? By the way she is charmed to find she has been a goddess all this while without suspecting one word of the matter, tho', truth to say, in her youth she might have made a very good one, and you have deified many in your time who have deserved it less, I daresay; her figure and her eyes would not have disgraced Madam Juno herself.—Lady Hesketh to Hayley, 21st February, 1802. In reply Hayley says, 'That appellation occurs in some of Cowper's letters to Lady Hesketh.'

<sup>2</sup> Spencer Cowper (1713-1774) was Dean of Durham, and lies buried in Durham Cathedral. He was Cowper's uncle, being the son of the Lord Chancellor Cowper whose brother the Judge was the poet's grandfather.

or perhaps celestial of a higher nature. You may, too, censure or correct more freely in black and white, than in conversation, and I consider your corrections in a more calm state of resignation than if by to alfircate (*sic*). The problem is easy enough to solve if not made difficult by an unskilful way of laying it down, and for assistance in understanding it, your own projection of the eclipse forty-eight placed before you will be all that is necessary. I think the method neat and geometrical. I am certain it is short, and sure, for since I wrote to you I have tried it in several other cases. But enough of this now, and to prevent any more of these fits and starts of lunacy your best way will be to get rid of my importunity by an answer. I am sorry the stars have used you so ill, but doubt whether they have not been more culpable in deserting your interests which are surrounded with garters. You certainly have now a more ready way to get at the favour of the Great than by your celestial knowledge. Your display of that was but laying a lane before them which contracted all their greatness into an atom: it is true it magnified their Creator—but what is that to them? Now you lay before them their own greatness, and what is really the fruit of your genius shall hereafter be shown as the contrivance and art of the great proprietor. However, if you can from their vanity get a maintenance their goodness would never incline them to give, I think you are in the right to pursue the most probable means. I shall rejoice in any good you can obtain, and shall be glad to forward any schemes you can lay for obtaining it. May you long enjoy the sunshine you now court. I mean the sunshine of the

Great. As for myself, I have no hopes that want the ripening of parhelion—the cool hour of contemplation, the evening [ ]<sup>1</sup> radiance of the moon, and the illuminated arch of heaven will sufficiently answer my end, by drawing my mind nearer to that Source, the Fountain of all hope and the Source of all our good. So ends your friend and rhapsodist

W. COWPER.

'Dear Toby,' to whom the next two letters are addressed, was probably Mr. Clotworthy Rowley. They are intensely interesting owing to the allusions to Theodora.

TO 'DEAR TOBY'

*Temple, Feb. 21, 1754.*

DEAR TOBY,—I was just going to bestow the highest encomiums upon you for having been so very punctual, when, casting my eye upon your postscript, it occurred to me that you were not entirely disinterested in the affair; yet I must in justice to my own merit allow it to be a very laudable motive, and wonder not that you, who have been blessed with a specimen of my excellent taste in poetry, are impatient till you are in full possession of all my works. A certain person<sup>2</sup> who is not at all dear to me to speak of, has given herself the air of calling me a coxcomb often before now. I am willing to allow her the privilege of calling me so, because I know she cannot in reality think me one and love me as she does. Now think not that because I have a small regard for you, that therefore I shall dispense with your taking the same

<sup>1</sup> Word missing.

<sup>2</sup> Theodora.

liberty ; for you may still entertain a friendship for me and nevertheless be really and truly convinced that I am a coxcomb ; nay, you may like me the better for that reason, because *simile agit in simile*. And are you not a coxcomb ? can you deny it ? is not your last letter a proof of it ? Don't you there brag of being better qualified to entertain the fair sex than my worship ? and don't you undervalue me as being deficient in the most essential point perhaps of good breeding ? Whatever merit you are willing to ascribe to yourself from a more frequent communication with the vicious part of your sex, I am very ready to allow you ; only at the same time you must acknowledge that all the advantages which arise from a decent familiarity with the worthiest part of it, are on my side. The honest impudence (as Ranger calls it) of a libertine will hardly defend him from bashfulness in the company of a modest woman ; nay, the very means he has made use of whereby he has acquired this honest independence, disqualify him for the entertainment of any except those women to whom he owes it. If this be the case, which is likely to make the best figure in the best company, he who cannot say a rude thing or he who in order to avoid saying a rude thing must take care not to open his lips ? Come, then, honest impudent Toby, own for once that it is not so wonderful that I should have won the affections of a virtuous woman, who saw that my behaviour, vicious as it was, had no mixture of affectation in it, as it would have been had you prevailed in the same manner, who could not do it by appearing in your own undisguised character, nor have affected to put on a sedate sober appear-

ance, without being discovered for an impostor. I believe I have said rather more in my own favour than there is foundation for, and have somewhat extenuated, or rather been silent upon the subject of the good qualities you are really master of. But all this you must impute to my modest assurance. It is plain from your letter that you have a heart susceptible to those sublime enjoyments which you seem almost to envy me; there is also some appearance of contrition towards the latter end of it, for which reason, if the maxim be true, that when a man of sense perceives and confesses his error he is in a fair way to amend it, I know not any reason you have to despair of succeeding in your addresses to a virtuous woman. I wish you were once fairly taken in, for an affair of that sort would undoubtedly complete your reformation; nothing else can. However, I would advise you to wait till you are deeply smitten before you accost her as a lover: your reformation must be the effect of your regard for her, and of your very sincere regard for her; otherwise it can never last. I think I know enough of you to pronounce that any good resolution you can make merely from a conviction that it is right, will be of no long continuation; your passions must be strongly affected, so that what you resolve upon it shall become delightful to you to perform, or you are as far from the performance of it as before you resolved.

I will answer your question in your own words 'You must amend, or despair of finding in honest matrimony a sure contentment.' Whatever means you think likely to work such a reformation I would advise you to pursue: neither the single nor the

married state affords any sure contentment but to the virtuous. A vicious man in the single state may perhaps find his existence, at the latter end of his days, barely tolerable, while he is young it may possibly be agreeable rather than not, but this is very hazardous. In the married state his case is desperate, whether young or old he must be miserable—for vicious please to read libertine—and you may apply all I have said to yourself. I look upon you as one of the very best species of libertines, otherwise I should not subscribe myself your affectionate friend,

Wm. COWPER.

*P.S.*—You may remember that there was some small difference between me and the person I hinted at in the beginning of my letter; the enclosed was wrote upon that subject since I saw you last. All is comfortable and happy between us at present, and I doubt not will continue so for ever. Indeed we had neither of us any great reason to be dissatisfied, and perhaps quarrelled merely for the sake of the reconciliation, which you may be sure made ample amends. Adieu !

TO 'DEAR TOBY'

*Great Berkhamstead, I don't know when.*

DEAR TOBY,—I am in such a hurry, I hardly know how to set one leg before t'other to get to the end of my letter, and God knows if I shall be able to do it to-night. Dancing all last night, in bed one half of the day, and shooting all the other half, and am now going to—what? to kill a boding screech owl perched upon a tree just by my window.

Have at you, old Wise Acre. What an Irishman am I ! I went to destroy one of Dame Pallas' poultry, and she to defend her songster cast a cloud before my eyes, and, behold, I could not see to the end of my gun. I have had no time, Toby, to versify for you except what I stole under a hedge to-day, while I was shooting, so there I sat me down with my pencil in my hand and my gun by my side, *in utrumque paratus*.

A piece of a rare song, Toby, I heard t'other day, follows here, as it deserves the first place, and then my own—

Young gentlemen listen awhile  
And unto you I will declare,  
Oh, how the King's Fisher did serve  
Those rogues that belong to Algier.

Captain Wheeler he did us command,  
And no man shall force me to lye,  
And the chiefest of his whole delight,  
Was in chasing of the enemy.

The Turks swam as thick by her side  
As e'er you saw fish in the sea ;  
But we spared as many as we could,  
And that was out of Christianity.  
Da Capo.

I have twisted the sense of the words to your present condition as much as possible ; not taking Horace's meaning, which I suppose you would choose.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No doubt he is referring to the well-known line in Epistle II. to Lollius

Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi  
(When kings make fools of themselves the people suffer),  
which is certainly the opposite sentiment to that in Cowper's verses.

## ON LOYALTY

Cum tot sustineant Reges et tanta, neque ulla  
 Parte voluptati Deliciisque vacent :  
 Cum varios capiti affigat Diadema Dolores,  
 Bellorumque premant sollicitentque Minae :  
 Cur queritur Populus ? cur cæco murmure mussat ?  
 Inque suum insane vim meditatur Herum ?  
 Qui Vigil excubias agit usque et (sustinet) usque  
 Imperii, Populus nequa laboret, onus.  
 Hoc Satanae scelus est nec Dæmone dignius ul(lum)  
 Nam primum in Satanae pectore crime(n erat)  
 Præmia quin date digna viro verusque sequatur  
 Collata in gentem commoda gentis amor.  
 Illum Jure colant Populi, tueantur, amante(s) ;  
 Ille colit Populos, ille tueretur, amat.  
 Tu vero (si talis erit) quicunque verendum  
 Execrare caput Principis, Eia ! Tace,  
 Nec quia rara fides Regi fert præmia, Demens  
 Immeritum Regem quem venerere putas ;  
 Ipse tibi plaudas, quæ laus est optima, Laudem  
 Externam Ingenuis est meruisse satis.

The following translation is by the Rev. J. Tarver,  
 M.A., Rector of Filgrave, Bucks :—

## ON LOYALTY

Since kings sustain the burdens of the state,  
 No pleasant hours, no leisure for the great.  
 Since the uneasy head which wears a crown  
 The threatenings of impending wars weigh down,  
 Why do the people rage with murmurs dark  
 Ready to fall on him who steers the bark ?  
 'Tis his to watch, attent to every call  
 Lest any burden on his people fall.  
 'Tis Satan leads astray with devilish art,  
 For Satan ever takes the fouler part.  
 Nay, rather, be the people's love his due  
 Who to his people's love is always true,

Him let the nations love and guard and bless,  
 Whom, loving, guarding, blessing, all confess.  
 But thou, if such thou art, who dar'st with ill  
 To curse that sacred head—Oh, ‘Peace, be still.’  
 Truth to the king may meet with rare reward,  
 Think not his claim on thee is therefore barred,  
 Approve thyself praiseworthy—that is best,  
 Only deserving, loyal souls can rest.

TO ROBERT LLOYD <sup>1</sup>

1754.

‘Tis not that I design to rob  
 Thee of thy birthright, gentle Bob,  
 For thou art born sole heir and single  
 Of dear Mat Prior’s easy jingle ;  
 Not that I mean, while thus I knit  
 My threadbare sentiments together,  
 To show my genius or my wit,  
 When God and you know I have neither ;  
 Or such, as might be better shown  
 By letting poetry alone.  
 ‘Tis not with either of these views,  
 That I presume to address the Muse :  
 But to divert a fierce banditti  
 (Sworn foes to every thing that’s witty),  
 That, with a black infernal train,  
 Make cruel inroads in my brain,  
 And daily threaten to drive thence  
 My little garrison of sense :  
 The fierce banditti which I mean,  
 Are gloomy thoughts led on by Spleen.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Lloyd (1733-1764), author of and member of the Nonsense Club. He fell into dissolute habits, and died at 31.

Then there's another reason yet,  
 Which is, that I may fairly quit  
 The debt which justly became due  
 The moment when I heard from you ;  
 And you might grumble, crony mine,  
 If paid in any other coin ;  
 Since twenty sheets of lead, God knows  
 (I would say twenty sheets of prose),  
 Can ne'er be deem'd worth half so much  
 As one of gold, and yours was such.  
 Thus the preliminaries settled,  
 I fairly find myself pitch-kettled ;<sup>1</sup>  
 And cannot see, though few see better,  
 How I shall hammer out a letter.

First, for a thought—since all agree—  
 A thought—I have it—let me see—  
 'Tis gone again—plague on 't ! I thought  
 I had it—but I have it not.  
 Dame Gurton thus, and Hodge her son,<sup>2</sup>  
 That useful thing, her needle, gone,  
 Rake well the cinders, sweep the floor,  
 And sift the dust behind the door ;  
 While eager Hodge beholds the prize  
 In old grimalkin's glaring eyes ;  
 And Gammer finds it on her knees  
 In every shining straw she sees.  
 This simile were apt enough,  
 But I've another, critic-proof.  
 The virtuoso thus at noon,  
 Broiling beneath a July sun,  
 The gilded butterfly pursues  
 O'er hedge and ditch, through gaps and mews,

<sup>1</sup> Puzzled.

<sup>2</sup> Comedy of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, attributed to Bishop Still,  
 1565.

And after many a vain essay  
To captivate the tempting prey,  
Gives him at length the lucky pat,  
And has him safe beneath his hat ;  
Then lifts it gently from the ground ;  
But ah ! 'tis lost as soon as found ;  
Culprit his liberty regains ;  
Flits out of sight and mocks his pains.  
The sense was dark, 'twas therefore fit  
With simile to illustrate it ;  
But as too much obscures the sight,  
As often as too little light,  
We have our similes cut short,  
For matters of more grave import.  
That Matthew's numbers run with ease  
Each man of common sense agrees ;  
All men of common sense allow  
That Robert's lines are easy too ;  
Where then the preference shall we place,  
Or how do justice in this case ?  
'Matthew' (says Fame) 'with endless pains  
Smoothed and refined the meanest strains,  
Nor suffer'd one ill-chosen rhyme  
To escape him at the idlest time ;  
And thus o'er all a lustre cast,  
That while the language lives shall last.'  
'An't please your ladyship' (quoth I,—  
For 'tis my business to reply;) ;  
'Sure so much labour, so much toil,  
Bespeak at least a stubborn soil.  
Theirs be the laurel-wreath decreed,  
Who both write well and write full speed ;  
Who throw their Helicon about  
As freely as a conduit spout.

Friend Robert, thus like *chien scavant*,  
 Lets fall a poem *en passant*,  
 Nor needs his genuine ore refine ;  
 'Tis ready polish'd from the mine.'

Dr. Cowper died in 1756; his second wife, Rebecca, lived till 1762. Owing to the objections of Mr. Ashley Cowper, Theodora's father, the engagement between Cowper and Theodora was now broken off. Cowper, who took his farewell of her about 1756, was at first disconsolate, but as the following letter shows, he, very soon after, lost his heart to another 'lovely and beloved little girl.'

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY<sup>1</sup>

*Lond., Aug. 1758.*

DELICIAE ET LEPORES MEI,—Qui Gallicé scripsisti, responsum habes Latinum; non quia Linguam hanc satis calleo, sed istam quia nimis ignoro. Literas Anglicanas te contempturum certò scivi. Dum tu Rhadamanthum tuum, quicunque is est, per villas atque oppida sectaris, majori, ut ais, opere quam lucro; ego, neque laborans, neque lucrum sperans, otiosam, ideoque mihi jucundissimam vitam ago; neque rus tibi invideo, lutulentum scilicet, et intempestivo diluvio quotidie obrutum. Aliquando autem et ego in suburbana rura, amicum vel amicam visurus, proficiscor: breve est iter, quod vel pedes, vel currū conducto facile perficias; perraro enim, et nunquam nisi coactus, in caballum ascendo, quippe qui nates teneras habeo, quas exiguus usus contundit

<sup>1</sup> Clotworthy Rowley was the third son of Sir William Rowley, of Tendring Hall, Suffolk. He married Miss Campbell of Bath, became a barrister and M.P. for Downpatrick, and died in 1805.

et dilacerat. Triduum nuper, Villæ quam dicunt Greenwich, commoratus sum. O beatum Triduum, quod si Triennium fuisset, immortalitatem Superis minime invidissem. Puellulam ibi amabilem et amatam, de quâ sæpius tibi locutus sum, inveni. Èâ Virgo est ætate (annos nata sedecim) ut dies singuli novum aliquod decus ad formam afferant. Modestia, et (quod mirum videtur in Fæminâ) taciturnitate est maximâ; quando autem loquitur, crederes Musam loqui. Hei mihi, quod Sidus tam clarum aliò spectet! Indiâ Occidentali oriundum, illuc redditum est; mihique nihil præter suspiria et lacrymas relictum. Tu me amore sentis torqueri,—ego te lasciviâ.—

Paucis abhinc diebus ad Hortos Bonæ Mariæ sum profectus; delicias ejus loci nequeo satis laudare. Ludi Scenici qui ibi exhibentur, more Italorum, nostrâ vero lingua, sunt constituti. Partes quas Recitativas vocant, ridiculæ sunt ultrâ modum; cantilenæ autem suavissimæ. Unum hoc timendum, ne sub Dio sedentem, tussis occupet vel febris.

Quod ad amicum nostrum Alston attinet, neque Epistolam mihi misit quamlibet, neque missurum reor; scio enim jamdudum ignavam hominis naturam, et obliviousam. Si videris, objurgationes aliquos a me in eum confer. VALE.

### *Translation*

#### TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY

*London, Aug. 1758.*

MY DELIGHTFULLY-FUNNY FRIEND,—You wrote in French and are now to receive an answer in Latin, not because I am sufficiently versed in this language, but because I know very little about the other. I

knew, for certain, that you would despise a letter in English.

While you are following your Rhadamanthus with more pains, as you tell me, than profit, I, who neither take pains nor hope for profit, am leading an idle, and therefore what is to me a most agreeable life: nor do I envy you the country, dirty as it now is, and daily deluged with unseasonable rain. Sometimes, indeed, I go into the adjacent parts of the country, to visit a friend or a lady; but it is a short journey, and such as may easily be performed on foot, or in a hired carriage, for never, unless compelled to do it, do I mount a horse, because I have a tender skin, which with little exercise of that kind suffers sorely. I lately passed three days at Greenwich; a blessed three days, and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one can be more modest, nor (which seems wonderful in a woman) more silent; but when she speaks, you might believe that a Muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region; having risen in the West Indies, thither it is about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears.

You see me tortured with love, I you with lasciviousness.

A few days ago I set off for Marylebone gardens, to the delights of which place it is impossible to do justice. Theatrical plays have been organised, which they perform there in the Italian fashion,

only in our language. The portions styled recitatives are absurd beyond measure, but the songs are most sweet. There is this one thing, however, to be feared, namely, that, sitting in the open air, one may catch a cold, if not a fever.

As to our friend Alston, he has not written to me, nor is he likely to write; for I have long understood the sluggish and forgetful nature of the man. Should you see him, give him a sound rating for me. Farewell.

Whilst at the Temple Cowper was a member of the Nonsense Club, a society of literary triflers, all Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday; and he contributed a few papers to *The Connoisseur*, and ‘produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to become popular.’ The members of the Club were—besides Cowper—Bonnell Thornton, George Colman (the elder), Joseph Hill, the lifelong friend of Cowper, Bensley, and William De Grey.

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, AT TENDRING HALL,  
NEAR IPSWICH

*2 September 1762.*

DEAR ROWLEY,—Your letter has taken me just in the crisis; to-morrow I set off for Bright-helmston,<sup>1</sup> and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses us ill; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetic

<sup>1</sup> Brighton.

- as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour; but my resolution is (and I would advise you to adopt it), never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the meantime *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortunes is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but till the Stoics became cox-combs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.
- If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by any thing but his natural temper? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are

directed by others ! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly ; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it ; that degree of it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company ; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it : but here it is, such as it is, and much good may you do with it. I have no estate, as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy. Adieu ! Carr is well, and gives his love to you.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

Cowper was now presented by his kinsman, Major Cowper, to the office of Clerk of the Journals to the House of Lords, a desirable and lucrative appointment. The knowledge, however, that he would have to qualify himself at the bar of the House gave him terrible distress. Cowper, as is well known, had some not very important physical defect, and we are told that an acquaintance, who wished to obtain the post for another, declared that the fact

was disqualifying, and that he would make it public. A man of stronger fibre would have bade the wretch do his worst, but Cowper's sensitiveness quailed.

The threat, however, could not have been the only cause of Cowper's despair; constitutional melancholy and religious troubles also weighed. The defect we have alluded to may have originated some of his sufferings at Market Street.

The following letter was written in the midst of this *Sturm und Drang* :—

TO LADY HESKETH

*The Temple, August 9, 1763.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them—an employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numscull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author, who has a spark of love for his country. Oh, my good Cousin! if I

was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights ; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool ; but I have more weaknesses than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this, and God forbid I should speak it in vanity, I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, Cousin ? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, Cousin, there was a possibility that I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me, and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear Cousin ! so much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which, in that case, I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.—Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

Having brooded over his accumulated troubles till worked into a fit of madness, Cowper attempted to commit suicide ; and thereupon was removed to

a private asylum at St. Albans, kept by Dr. Cotton.<sup>1</sup> This was his ‘Second Derangement.’ Although his health and reason were regained in about four months, he stayed at the Collegium Insanorum, as it was called, about a year and a half. In the realistic and touching ‘Song of Mercy and Judgment,’<sup>2</sup> written about this time, Cowper celebrates his recovery with intense thankfulness and joy.

Alluding in this poem to his previous dreadful state, he says—

Then what soul-distressing noises  
Seemed to reach me from below,  
Visionary scenes and voices,  
Flames of Hell and screams of woe.

Cowper, in short, was what we have now learnt to call a clair-audient or hearer of voices. Cases of clair-audience are not infrequent. Thus one thinks of Bunyan, who, on Elstow Green, heard

The holy, heavenly voice  
That made him pause, and bade him sin no more;

and Samuel Johnson; but of all the cases of clair-audience among literary men, Cowper’s is the most extraordinary; all through his life he heard voices, mostly of a distressing character, especially during his last decade.

Cowper’s income having, through the kindness of his relations, been made enough to keep him,

<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Cotton (1705-1788). A popular poet of his day, and contributor to Dodsley’s ‘Collection.’ Wrote *Visions in Verse*. Settled at St. Albans as a physician in 1740, and here kept the *Collegium Insanorum*, as he himself described the asylum at which Cowper stayed.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Unpublished Poems of Cowper*, p. 17.

he determined not to return to London, but to retire to some quiet place in the country ; and, so as to be near his brother John, of Benet College, Cambridge, decided on Huntingdon.

Cowper took with him to Huntingdon a servant of Dr. Cotton's, named Sam Roberts, and a destitute lad, Dick Coleman, whom he provided for.

The first letter from Huntingdon is to his old schoolfellow and friend, Joseph Hill.

### III. AT HUNTINGDON

TO JOSEPH HILL, COOKE'S COURT, CAREY STREET,  
LONDON

*Huntingdon, June 24, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,—The only recompence I can make you for your kind attention to my affairs, during my illness, is to tell you that, by the mercy of God, I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This, I believe, will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

I left St. Albans on the 17th, and arrived that day at Cambridge, spent some time there with my brother, and came hither on the 22nd. I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions ; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which, however, is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Albans, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And, whereas the Turkish Spy<sup>1</sup> says, he kept no servant because he would not

<sup>1</sup> Written by John Paul Marana at Paris.

have an enemy in his house, I hired mine because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them, but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

The river Ouse, I forget how they spell it, is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town it is, I believe, as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks, these being attributes which, in strict truth, belong to neither. Fluellen<sup>1</sup> would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning.

I beg you will remember me to all my friends, which is a task will cost you no great pains to execute—particularly remember me to those of your own house, and believe me—Your very affectionate,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, July 1, 1765.*

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,—Since the visit you were so kind as to pay me in the Temple (the only time I ever saw you without pleasure), what have I not suffered! And since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not

<sup>1</sup> See Shakespeare's *Henry V.*, Act iv. scene 6, Fluellen's speech about the river in Macedon and the river in Monmouth.

enjoyed ! You know, by experience, how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever ; but, Oh the fever of the brain ! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice ; nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise : when I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I ever received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it, and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

I write thus to you that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature ; which you might be apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world ; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so : but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness which without it I should never have found ; and I know, and have experience of it every day, that the mercy of God, to him who believes himself the object of it, is more than sufficient to compensate for the loss of every other blessing.

You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built. What I have

written would appear like enthusiasm to many, for we are apt to give that name to every warm affection of the mind in others which we have not experienced in ourselves; but to you, who have so much to be thankful for, and a temper inclined to gratitude, it will not appear so.

I beg you will give my love to Sir Thomas,<sup>1</sup> and believe that I am obliged to you both for inquiring after me, at St. Albans.—Yours ever,      W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Huntingdon, July 3, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,—Whatever you may think of the matter, it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live upon sheep's heads, and liver and lights, like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless encumbrance. My butcher's bill for last week amounted to four shillings and ten-pence. I set off with a leg of lamb, and was forced to give part of it away to my washerwoman. Then I made an experiment upon a sheep's heart, and that was too little. Next I put three pounds of beef into a pie, and this had like to have been too much, for it lasted three days, though my landlord was admitted to a share in it. Then as to small beer, I am puzzled to pieces about it. I have bought as much for a shilling as will serve us at least a month, and it is grown sour already. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their

<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Hesketh, Lady Hesketh's husband.

countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.

I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered. This was from my woollen-draper; a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsible man, and extremely civil. He has a cold bath, and has promised me a key of it, which I shall probably make use of in the winter. He has undertaken, too, to get me the *St. James's Chronicle* three times a week, and to show me Hinchinbrook House,<sup>1</sup> and to do every service for me in his power; so that I did not exceed the truth, you see, when I spoke of his civility. Here is a card-assembly, and a dancing-assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em, just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor; and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places, I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition.

You are old dog at a bad tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it

<sup>1</sup> The seat of the Cromwells—that is, of Oliver's ancestors. His uncle, Sir Oliver Cromwell, occupied Hinchinbrook at the time of the future Lord Protector's birth.

if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad! I leave him entirely to your mercy.

My dear Joe, you desire me to write long letters—I have neither matter enough, nor perseverance enough for the purpose. However, if you can but contrive to be tired of reading as soon as I am tired of writing, we shall find that short ones answer just as well; and, in my opinion, this is a very practicable measure.

My friend Colman has had good fortune; I wish him better fortune still; which is, that he may make a right use of it. The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley<sup>1</sup> are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it is their own fault.

I was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If you can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour if you will pay him for me; but do it at your leisure.—Yours and theirs,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, July 4, 1765.*

BEING just emerged from the Ouse, I sit down to thank you, my dear cousin, for your friendly and comfortable letter. What could you think of my unaccountable behaviour to you in that visit I mentioned in my last? I remember I neither spoke to you nor looked at you. The solution of the

<sup>1</sup> See letter of 4th September 1765, 'Two of my friends have been cut off during my illness,' etc. Lloyd died in 1764.

mystery indeed followed soon after, but at the time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunderstorm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company was, when I was not in my senses. It was the first of the kind, and I trust in God it will be the last.

How naturally does affliction make us Christians! and how impossible is it when all human help is vain, and the whole Earth too poor and trifling to furnish us with one moment's peace, how impossible is it then to avoid looking at the Gospel! It gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others, than to advance their faith. But if it has that effect upon any, it is owing to their reasoning amiss, and drawing their conclusions from false premises. He who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners, and a reformation of the heart itself, to madness, is guilty of an absurdity that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself; for by so doing he ascribes a reasonable effect to an unreasonable cause, and a positive effect to a negative. But when Christianity only is to be sacrificed, he that stabs deepest is always the wisest man. You, my dear cousin, yourself will be apt to think I carry the matter too far, and that in the present warmth of my heart I make too ample a confession in saying, that I am only now a convert. You think I always believed, and I thought so too; but you were deceived, and so was I. I called myself indeed a Christian; but He who

knows my heart knows that I never did a right thing, nor abstained from a wrong one, because I was so ; but if I did either, it was under the influence of some other motive. And it is such seeming Christians, such pretending believers, that do most mischief to the cause, and furnish the strongest arguments to support the infidelity of its enemies ; unless profession and conduct go together, the man's life is a lie, and the validity of what he professes itself is called in question. The difference between a Christian and an Unbeliever would be so striking, if the treacherous allies of the Church would go over at once to the other side, that I am satisfied religion would be no loser by the bargain.

I reckon it one instance of the Providence that has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind upon the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long neglected point made it necessary that, while my mind was yet weak, and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it, as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an

irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself; and it is well for me that he was so.

My dear cousin, you know not half the deliverances I have received; my brother is the only one in the family who does. My recovery is indeed a signal one; but a greater, if possible, went before it. My future life must express my thankfulness, for by words I cannot do it.

I pray God to bless you and my friend Sir Thomas.  
—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, July 5, 1765.*

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,—My pen runs so fast you will begin to wish you had not put it in motion, but you must consider we have not met, even by letter, almost these two years, which will account, in some measure, for my pestering you in this manner; besides, my last was no answer to yours, and therefore I consider myself as still in your debt. To say truth, I have this long time promised myself a correspondence with you as one of my principal pleasures.

I should have written to you from St. Albans long since, but was willing to perform quarantine first, both for my own sake, and because I thought my letters would be more satisfactory to you from any other quarter. You will perceive I allowed myself a very sufficient time for the purpose, for I date my recovery from the 25th of last July, having been ill seven months, and well twelve months. It was on that day my brother came to see me; I was

far from well when he came in; yet though he only stayed one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still laboured under, and the next morning found myself a new creature. But to the present purpose.

As far as I am acquainted with this place, I like it extremely. Mr. Hodgson, the minister of the parish, made me a visit the day before yesterday. He is very sensible, a good preacher, and conscientious in the discharge of his duty. He is very well known to Dr. Newton, Bishop of Bristol, the author of the *Treatise on the Prophecies*, one of our best bishops, and who has written the most demonstrative proof of the truth of Christianity, in my mind, that ever was published.<sup>1</sup>

There is a village, called Hertford, about a mile and a half from hence. The church there is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which being better than any thing else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

‘Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,  
And I not good enough to die with thee.’

The distance of this place from Cambridge is the worst circumstance belonging to it. My brother and I are fifteen miles asunder, which, considering that I came hither for the sake of being near him, is rather too much. I wish that young man was better known in the family. He has as many good

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Newton (1704-1782), author of *Dissertations on the Prophecies* (3 vols. 1754-58).

qualities as his nearest kindred could wish to find in him.

As Mr. Quin<sup>1</sup> very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, ‘here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision.’ So that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness, rather than scarcity.

Fare thee well, my good and dear cousin.—Ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*July 12, 1765.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—You are very good to me, and if you will only continue to write at such intervals as you find convenient, I shall receive all that pleasure which I proposed to myself from our correspondence. I desire no more than that you would never drop me for any great length of time together, for I shall then think you only write because something happened to put you in mind of me, or for some other reason equally mortifying. I am not, however, so unreasonable as to expect you should perform this act of friendship so frequently as myself, for you live in a world swarming with engagements, and my hours are almost all my own. You must every day be employed in doing what is expected from you by a thousand others, and I have nothing to do but what is most agreeable to myself.

Our mentioning Newton’s treatise on the Prophecies brings to my mind an anecdote of Dr. Young,<sup>2</sup> who, you know, died lately at Welwyn.

<sup>1</sup> James Quin, actor (1693-1766). He died at Bath the year after this letter was written. Quin was the great rival of Garrick for many years. He was, however, a greater wit than actor.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Young (1683-1765) wrote *Night Thoughts*, 1742.

Dr. Cotton, who was intimate with him, paid him a visit about a fortnight before he was seized with his last illness. The old man was then in perfect health; the antiquity of his person, the gravity of his utterance, and the earnestness with which he discoursed about religion, gave him, in the doctor's eye, the appearance of a prophet. They had been delivering their sentiments upon this book of Newton, when Young closed the conference thus:—  
‘My friend, there are two considerations upon which my faith in Christ is built as upon a rock: the fall of man, the redemption of man, and the resurrection of man—the three cardinal articles of our religion—are such as human ingenuity could never have invented; therefore they must be divine. The other argument is this: If the Prophecies have been fulfilled (of which there is abundant demonstration), the Scripture must be the word of God; and if the Scripture is the word of God, Christianity must be true.’

This treatise on the Prophecies serves a double purpose: it not only proves the truth of religion, in a manner that never has been nor ever can be controverted; but it proves likewise, that the Roman Catholic is the apostate and antichristian Church, so frequently foretold both in the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, so fatally connected is the refutation of Popery with the truth of Christianity, when the latter is evinced by the completion of the Prophecies, that in proportion as light is thrown upon the one, the deformities and errors of the other are more plainly exhibited. But I leave you to the book itself; there are parts of it which may possibly afford you less entertainment than the rest, because

you have never been a schoolboy; but in the main it is so interesting, and you are so fond of that which is so, that I am sure you will like it.

My dear cousin, how happy am I in having a friend to whom I can open my heart upon these subjects! I have many intimates in the world, and have had many more than I shall have hereafter, to whom a long letter upon these most important articles would appear tiresome, at least, if not impertinent. But I am not afraid of meeting with that reception from you, who have never yet made it your interest that there should be no truth in the word of God. May this everlasting truth be your comfort while you live, and attend you with peace and joy in your last moments! I love you too well not to make this a part of my prayers; and when I remember my friends on these occasions, there is no likelihood that you can be forgotten.—Yours ever,

W. C.

*P.S.—Cambridge.*—I add this postscript at my brother's rooms.<sup>1</sup> He desires to be affectionately remembered to you; and if you are in town about a fortnight hence, when he proposes to be there himself, will take a breakfast with you.

#### TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, August 1, 1765.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—If I was to measure your obligation to write by my own desire to hear from you, I should call you an idle correspondent if a post went by without bringing me a letter, but I am

<sup>1</sup> Benet or Corpus Christi College.

not so unreasonable; on the contrary, I think myself very happy in hearing from you upon your own terms, as you find most convenient. Your short history of my family is a very acceptable part of your letter; if they really interest themselves in my welfare, it is a mark of their great charity for one who has been a disappointment and a vexation to them ever since he has been of consequence enough to be either. My friend the Major's<sup>1</sup> behaviour to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind: and, indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous; one need only furnish him with an opportunity to display them, and they are always ready to show themselves in his words and actions, and even in his countenance, at a moment's warning. I have great reason to be thankful—I have lost none of my acquaintance but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous. What would I not give, that every friend I have in the world were not almost but altogether Christians! My dear cousin, I am half afraid to talk in this style, lest I should seem to indulge a censorious humour, instead of hoping, as I ought, the best for all men. But what can be said against ocular proof? and what is hope when it is built upon presumption? To use the most Holy Name in the universe for no purpose, or a bad one, contrary to His own express commandment; to pass the day, and the succeeding days, weeks, and months, and years, without one act of private devotion, one confession of our sins, or one

<sup>1</sup> Major Cowper of 'The Park,' Hertford.

thanksgiving for the numberless blessings we enjoy : to hear the word of God in public with a distracted attention, or with none at all ; to absent ourselves voluntarily from the blessed communion, and to live in the total neglect of it, though our Saviour has charged it upon us with an express injunction, are the common and ordinary liberties which the generality of professors allow themselves : and what is this but to live without God in the world ? Many causes may be assigned for this antichristian spirit, so prevalent among Christians ; but one of the principal I take to be their utter forgetfulness that they have the word of God in their possession.

My friend Sir William Russell<sup>1</sup> was distantly related to a very accomplished man, who, though he never believed the Gospel, admired the Scriptures as the sublimest compositions in the world, and read them often. I have been intimate myself with a man of fine taste, who has confessed to me that, though he could not subscribe to the truth of Christianity itself, yet he never could read St. Luke's account of our Saviour's appearance to the two disciples going to Emmaus, without being wonderfully affected by it ; and he thought that if the stamp of divinity was any where to be found in Scripture, it was strongly marked and visibly impressed upon that passage. If these men, whose hearts were chilled with the darkness of infidelity, could find such charms in the mere style of the Scripture, what must they find there, whose eye penetrates deeper than the letter, and who firmly believe themselves interested in all the invaluable

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's schoolfellow at Westminster. Drowned while bathing in the Thames, 1757.

privileges of the Gospel! ‘He that believeth on me is passed from death unto life,’ though it be as plain a sentence as words can form, has more beauties in it for such a person than all the labours antiquity can boast of. If my poor man of taste, whom I have just mentioned, had searched a little further, he might have found other parts of the sacred history as strongly marked with the characters of divinity as that he mentioned. The parable of the Prodigal Son, the most beautiful fiction that ever was invented; our Saviour’s speech to His disciples, with which He closes His earthly ministration, full of the sublimest dignity and tenderest affection, surpass every thing that I ever read, and, like the Spirit, by which they were dictated, fly directly to the heart. If the Scripture did not disdain all affectation of ornament, one should call these, and such as these, the ornamental parts of it; but the matter of it is that upon which it principally stakes its credit with us, and the style, however excellent and peculiar to itself, is only one of those many external evidences by which it recommends itself to our belief.

I shall be very much obliged to you for the book you mention; you could not have sent me any thing that would have been more welcome, unless you had sent me your own meditations instead of them.—  
Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*August 14, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,—Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprized me of your intention to give me a call; and herein I find they were both mistaken.

But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you any time this fortnight. Now, how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the mean time, you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandizes.

You know, Joe, I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Alban's, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible* (that is vile French, I believe, but you can, now, correct it). My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt, without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant.

I am become a professed horseman, and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of

the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear ; but I think I have at last accomplished it. My love to all your family.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, August 17, 1765.*

You told me, my dear cousin, that I need not fear writing too often, and you perceive I take you at your word. At present, however, I shall do little more than thank you for the *Meditations*,<sup>1</sup> which I admire exceedingly : the author of them manifestly loved the truth with an undissembled affection, had made a great progress in the knowledge of it, and experienced all the happiness that naturally results from that noblest of all attainments. There is one circumstance, which he gives us frequent occasion to observe in him, which I believe will ever be found in the philosophy of every true Christian : I mean the eminent rank which he assigns to faith among the virtues, as the source and parent of them all. There is nothing more infallibly true than this ; and doubtless it is with a view to the purifying and sanctifying nature of a true faith, that our Saviour says, ‘He that believeth in Me hath everlasting life,’ with many other expressions to the same purpose. Considered in this light, no wonder it has the power of salvation ascribed to it ! Considered in any other, we must suppose it to operate like an Oriental talisman, if it obtains for us the least advantage ; which is an affront to Him who insists

<sup>1</sup> By Richard Pearsall (1698-1762). The book in question was : *Reliquiae Sacrae, or Meditations on Select Passages of Scripture and Sacred Dialogues between a Father and his Children ; published from his MSS., designed for the press by Thomas Gibbons, D.D. London, 1765.*

upon our having it, and will on no other terms admit us to His favour. I mention this distinguishing article in his Reflections the rather, because it serves for a solid foundation to the distinction I made, in my last, between the specious professor and the true believer, between him whose faith is his Sunday-suit and him who never puts it off at all ; a distinction I am a little fearful sometimes of making, because it is a heavy stroke upon the practice of more than half the Christians in the world.

My dear cousin, I told you I read the book with great pleasure, which may be accounted for from its own merit ; but perhaps it pleased me the more because you had travelled the same road before me. You know there is such a pleasure as this, which would want great explanation to some folks, being perhaps a mystery to those whose hearts are a mere muscle, and serve only for the purpose of an even circulation.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Sept. 4, 1765.*

THOUGH I have some very agreeable acquaintance at Huntingdon, my dear cousin, none of their visits are so agreeable as the arrival of your letters. I thank you for that which I have just received from Droxford;<sup>1</sup> and particularly for that part of it where you give me an unlimited liberty upon the subject I have already so often written upon. Whatever interests us deeply as naturally flows into the pen as it does from the lips, when every restraint is taken away, and we meet with a friend indulgent enough to attend to us. How many, in all the

<sup>1</sup> A village, twelve miles north-east of Southampton.

variety of characters with whom I am acquainted, could I find after the strictest search, to whom I could write as I do to you? I hope the number will increase. I am sure it cannot easily be diminished.

Poor —<sup>1</sup>! I have heard the whole of his history, and can only lament what I am sure I can make no apology for. Two of my friends<sup>2</sup> have been cut off, during my illness, in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon; and here am I, in better health and spirits than I can almost remember to have enjoyed before, after having spent months in the apprehension of instant death. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Why did I receive grace and mercy? Why was I preserved, afflicted for my good, received, as I trust, into favour, and blessed with the greatest happiness I can ever know or hope for in this life, while these were overtaken by the great arrest, unawakened, unrepenting, and every way unprepared for it? His infinite wisdom, to whose infinite mercy I owe it all, can solve these questions, and none beside Him. If a free-thinker, as many a man miscalls himself, could be brought to give a serious answer to them, he would certainly say, ‘Without doubt, sir, you was in great danger, you had a narrow escape, a most fortunate one indeed.’ How excessively foolish, as well as shocking! As if life depended upon luck, and all that we are or can be, all that we have or hope for, could possibly be referred to accident! Yet to this freedom of thought it is owing that He, who, as our Saviour tells us, is thoroughly apprized of the

<sup>1</sup> Probably Lloyd.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd and Bensley. See letter of 3rd July 1765.

death of the meanest of His creatures, is supposed to leave those whom He has made in His own image, to the mercy of chance; and to this therefore it is likewise owing that the correction which our heavenly Father bestows upon us, that we may be fitted to receive His blessing, is so often disappointed of its benevolent intention, and that men despise the chastening of the Almighty. Fevers and all diseases are accidents; and long life, recovery at least from sickness, is the gift of the physician. No man can be a greater friend to the use of means upon these occasions than myself, for it were presumption and enthusiasm to neglect them. God has endued them with salutary properties on purpose that we might avail ourselves of them, otherwise that part of His creation were in vain. But to impute our recovery to the medicine, and to carry our views no further, is to rob God of His honour, and is saying in effect that He has parted with the keys of life and death, and, by giving to a drug the power to heal us, has placed our lives out of His own reach. He that thinks thus may as well fall upon his knees at once and return thanks to the medicine that cured him, for it was certainly more immediately instrumental in his recovery than either the apothecary or the doctor. My dear cousin, a firm persuasion of the superintendence of Providence over all our concerns is absolutely necessary to our happiness. Without it, we cannot be said to believe in the Scripture, or practise any thing like resignation to His will. If I am convinced that no affliction can befall me without the permission of God, I am convinced likewise that He sees and knows that I am afflicted; believing this, I must in the same

degree believe that, if I pray to Him for deliverance, He hears me; I must needs know likewise with equal assurance that, if He hears, He will also deliver me, if that will upon the whole be most conducive to my happiness; and if He does not deliver me, I may be well assured that He has none but the most benevolent intention in declining it. He made us, not because we could add to His happiness, which was always perfect, but that we might be happy ourselves; and will He not in all His dispensations towards us, even in the minutest, consult that end for which He made us? To suppose the contrary, is (which we are not always aware of) affronting every one of His attributes; and at the same time the certain consequence of disbelieving His care for us is, that we renounce utterly our dependence upon Him. In this view it will appear plainly that the line of duty is not stretched too tight, when we are told that we ought to accept every thing at His hands as a blessing, and to be thankful even while we smart under the rod of iron with which He sometimes rules us. Without this persuasion, every blessing, however we may think ourselves happy in it, loses its greatest recommendation, and every affliction is intolerable. Death itself must be welcome to him who has this faith, and he who has it not must aim at it, if he is not a madman.

You cannot think how glad I am to hear you are going to commence lady and mistress of Freemantle.<sup>1</sup> I know it well, and could go to it from Southampton blindfold. You are kind to invite me to it, and I shall be so kind to myself as to accept the invitation, though I should not for a

<sup>1</sup> A villa near Southampton.

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TO LADY HESKETH

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slight consideration be prevailed upon to quit my beloved retirement at Huntingdon.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, Sept, 14, 1765.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—The longer I live here, the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it. I am upon very good terms with no less than five families, besides two or three odd scrambling fellows like myself. The last acquaintance I made here is with the race of the Unwins, consisting of father and mother,<sup>1</sup> son and daughter,<sup>2</sup> the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age, one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen; and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the perusal even of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being and having always been sincere in his belief and love of the Gospel. Another acquaintance I have lately made is with a Mr. Nicholson,<sup>3</sup> a North country divine, very poor, but

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Morley Unwin, Mary Unwin.

<sup>2</sup> William, Susanna.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Isaac Nicholson. Born in 1730. The curacies to which he walked every Sunday from Huntingdon were Papworth St. Agnes in Cambridgeshire, and Yelling in Hunts.

very good, and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot to serve two churches every Sunday through the year, his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ——, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple (for he is very religious), and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a FOUNTAIN of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect timepiece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. ——. He is very much a gentleman, well read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well.

You say, you hope it is not necessary for salvation, to undergo the same afflictions that I have undergone. No! my dear cousin. God deals with His children as a merciful father; He does not, as He Himself tells us, afflict willingly the sons of men. Doubtless there are many who, having been placed by His good providence out of the reach of any great evil and the influence of bad example, have

from their very infancy been partakers of the grace of his Holy Spirit, in such a manner as never to have allowed themselves in any grievous offence against Him. May you love Him more and more day by day; as every day, while you think upon Him, you will find Him more worthy of your love; and may you be finally accepted with Him for His sake, whose intercession for all His faithful servants cannot but prevail!—Yours ever,

W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, Oct. 10, 1765.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I should grumble at your long silence, if I did not know that one may love one's friends very well, though one is not always in the humour to write to them. Besides, I have the satisfaction of being perfectly sure that you have at least twenty times recollect ed the debt you owe me, and as often resolved to pay it: and perhaps while you remain indebted to me, you think of me twice as often as you would do, if the account was clear. These are the reflections with which I comfort myself, under the affliction of not hearing from you; my temper does not incline me to jealousy, and if it did, I should set all right by having recourse to what I have already received from you.

I thank God for your friendship, and for every friend I have; for all the pleasing circumstances of my situation here, for my health of body, and perfect serenity of mind. To recollect the past, and compare it with the present, is all I have need of to fill me with gratitude; and to be grateful is to be happy. Not that I think myself sufficiently

thankful, or that I shall ever be so in this life. The warmest heart perhaps only feels by fits, and is often as insensible as the coldest. This, at least, is frequently the case with mine, and oftener than it should be. But the mercy that can forgive iniquity will never be severe to mark our frailties; to that mercy, my dear cousin, I commend you, with earnest wishes for your welfare, and remain your ever affectionate,

W. C.

## TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765.*

I WISH you joy, my dear cousin, of being safely arrived in port from the storms of Southampton. For my own part, who am but as a Thames wherry, in a world full of tempest and commotion, I know so well the value of the creek I have put into, and the snugness it affords me, that I have a sensible sympathy with you in the pleasure you find in being once more blown to Droxford. I know enough of Miss Morley to send her my compliments; to which, if I had never seen her, her affection for you would sufficiently entitle her. If I neglected to do it sooner, it is only because I am naturally apt to neglect what I ought to do; and if I was as genteel as I am negligent, I should be the most delightful creature in the universe.

I am glad you think so favourably of my Huntingdon acquaintance; they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin if I had had materials for a minute description. She is

about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour, before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a great deal, and extremely well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease of address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.

Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should; but perhaps this awkwardness will

wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request before I left St. Albans, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe, with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard even while we are making them; and how delightful to meet with a proof of it in the effectual and actual grant of them! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means, which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty—a grace unlimited as undeserved; and, like its glorious Author, free in its course, and blessed in its operation!

My dear cousin! health and happiness, and above all, the favour of our great and gracious Lord, attend you! While we seek it in spirit and in truth, we are infinitely more secure of it than of the next breath we expect to draw. Heaven and earth have their destined periods; ten thousand worlds will vanish at the consummation of all things; but the word of God standeth fast; and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded.

My love to all who inquire after me.—Yours  
affectionately,

W. C.

TO MAJOR COWPER,<sup>1</sup> AT THE PARK HOUSE, NEAR  
HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765.*

MY DEAR MAJOR,—I have neither lost the use of my fingers nor my memory, though my unaccountable silence might incline you to suspect that I had lost both. The history of those things which have, from time to time, prevented my scribbling, would not only be insipid but extremely voluminous; for which reasons they will not make their appearance at present, nor probably at any time hereafter. If my neglecting to write to you were a proof that I had never thought of you, and that had been really the case, five shillings a piece would have been much too little to give for the sight of such a monster! but I am no such monster, nor do I perceive in myself the least tendency to such a transformation. You may recollect that I had but very uncomfortable expectations of the accommodation I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it to take our lot, where it shall please Providence to cast it, without anxiety! Had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became known to all the visitable people here, and -

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's cousin.

do verily think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw.

Here are three families who have received me with the utmost civility; and two in particular have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigrees and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men who suit my temper to a hair. The town is one of the neatest in England; the country is fine, for several miles about it; and the roads, which are all turnpike, and strike out four or five different ways, are perfectly good all the year round. I mention this latter circumstance chiefly because my distance from Cambridge has made a horseman of me at last, or at least is likely to do so. My brother and I meet every week, by an alternate reciprocation of intercourse, as Sam Johnson would express it; sometimes I get a lift in a neighbour's chaise, but generally ride. As to my own personal condition, I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candle-light see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, as much company as I choose, a deal of comfortable leisure, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all. I beg you will give my love to my dear cousin Maria, and to every body at the Park. If Mrs Maitland is with you, as I suspect by a passage in Lady Hesketh's letter to me, pray remember me to her very affectionately. And believe me, my dear friend, ever yours.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 25, 1765.*

DEAR JOE.—I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the *belle assemblée* at Southampton; high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge, which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially betaken myself to my books, and my fireside; and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so

well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I, at least, have been always apt to do), we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Mr. Gray's stanza :—

‘ Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear ;  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.’

Yours, dear Joe,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*November 5, 1765.*

DEAR JOE,—I wrote to you about ten days ago,

Soliciting a quick return of gold,  
To purchase certain horse that likes me well.

Either my letter or your answer to it, I fear, has miscarried. The former, I hope; because a miscarriage of the latter might be attended with bad consequences.

I find it impossible to proceed any longer in my present course, without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore entered into an agreement with the

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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Rev. Mr. Unwin, to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I would wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of this matter till about five days ago : but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here.—Yours ever,

W. C.

I know nobody so like Mrs. Unwin as my Aunt Madan,<sup>1</sup> I don't mean in person, for she is a much younger woman, but in character.

TO JOSEPH HILL

November 8, 1765.

DEAR SEPHUS,—Notwithstanding it is so agreeable a thing to read Law Lectures to the Students of Lyons' Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg leave to waive it. Danby Pickering must be the happy man ; and I heartily wish him joy of his deputyship. As to the treat, I think if it goes before the lecture, it will be apt to blunt the apprehension of the students ; and if it comes after, it may erase from their memories impressions so newly made. I could wish, therefore, that for their benefit and behoof, this circumstance were omitted. But if it be absolutely necessary, I hope Mr. Salt, or whoever takes the conduct of it, will see that it be

<sup>1</sup> Miss Judith Cowper, Pope's 'Erinna,' the famous beauty, afterwards Mrs. Madan, and the mother of the author of *Thelyphthora*. It was to her that Pope wrote 'Letters to a Lady.'

managed with the frugality and temperance becoming so learned a body. I shall be obliged to you if you will present my respects to Mr. Treasurer Salt, and express my concern at the same time, that he had the trouble of sending me two letters upon this occasion. The first of them never came to hand.

I think the Welshman<sup>1</sup> must ‘morris’;—what think you? If he withdraws to his native mountains we shall never catch him; so the best way is to let him run in debt no longer.

As to Eamonson, if he will listen to any thing, it must be to a remonstrance from you. A letter has no more effect upon him, than a messenger sent up to a paper kite; and he will make me pay the postage of all my epistles into the bargain.

I shall be obliged to you if you will tell me whether my exchequer is full or empty, and whether the revenue of last year is yet come in, that I may proportion my payments to the exigencies of my affairs.

My dear Sephus, give my love to your family, and believe me much obliged to you for your invitation.— At present I am in such an unsettled condition, that I can think of nothing but laying the foundation of my future abode at Unwin’s. My being admitted there, is the effect of the great good nature and friendly turn of that family, who I have great reason to believe are as desirous to do me service as they could be after a much longer acquaintance. Let your next, if it comes a week hence, be directed to me there.

The greatest part of the law books are those which Lord Cowper gave me. Those, and the very

<sup>1</sup> A tenant, living in Cowper's chambers in London.

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few which I bought myself, are all at the Major's service.

Stroke puss's back the wrong way and it will put her in mind of her master.—Yours ever,    W. C.

In December 1765 Cowper took up his abode with the Unwins.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*December 3, 1765.*

DEAR SEPHUS,—That I may return as particular an answer to your letter as possible, I will take it item by item.

First, then, I rejoice with you in the victory you have obtained over the Welshman's pocket. The reluctance with which he pays, and promises to pay, gives me but little concern, further than as it seems to threaten you with the trouble of many fruitless applications hereafter, in the receipt of my lordship's rents.

Secondly, I am glad that you have received some money on my account; and am still more pleased that you have so much in bank, after the remittances already made. But that which increases my joy to the highest pitch of possible augmentation, is, that you expect to receive more shortly.

Thirdly, I should be quite in raptures with the fair promises of Mr. Eamonson, if I believed he was in earnest. But the propensity of that gentleman to indulge himself in a jocular humour upon these serious occasions, though it is very entertaining, is not quite so good a joke as the performance of those promises would be. But men of wit are apt to be a little whimsical.

Fourthly, I do recollect that I myself am a little guilty of what I blame so much in Mr. Eamonson : in the last letter I wrote you, having returned you so facetious an answer to your serious enquiry concerning the entertainment to be given or not to be given to the gentlemen of New Inn, that you must needs have been at a loss to collect from it my real intentions. My sincere desire, however, in this respect is, that they may fast ; and being supported in this resolution, not only by an assurance that I can, and therefore ought to make a better use of my money, but also by the examples of my predecessors in the same business, Mr. Barrington and Mr. Schutz, I have no longer any doubt concerning the propriety of condemning them to abstinence upon this occasion ; and cannot but wish that point may be carried, if it can be done without engaging you in the trouble of any disagreeable haggling, and higgling, and twisting, and wriggling, to save my money.

Lastly, if I am not mistaken, I owe Thurlow five guineas. Be so kind as to pay him when he happens to fall in your way.—Yours, my dear Joe,

W. C.

The fire of the general election begins to smoke here already.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, March 6, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I have for some time past imputed your silence to the cause which you yourself assign for it, viz. to my change of situation ;

and was even sagacious enough to account for the frequency of your letters to me while I lived alone, from your attention to me in a state of such solitude, as seemed to make it an act of particular charity to write to me. I bless God for it, I was happy even then; solitude has nothing gloomy in it if the soul points upwards. St. Paul tells his Hebrew converts, ‘Ye are come (already come) to Mount Sion, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.’ When this is the case, as surely it was with them, or the Spirit of Truth had never spoken it, there is an end of the melancholy and dulness of life at once. You will not suspect me, my dear cousin, of a design to understand this passage literally. But this, however, it certainly means; that a lively faith is able to anticipate, in some measure, the joys of that heavenly society which the soul shall actually possess hereafter.

Since I have changed my situation I have found still greater cause of thanksgiving to the Father of all mercies. The family with whom I live are Christians; and it has pleased the Almighty to bring me to the knowledge of them, that I may want no means of improvement in that temper and conduct which He is pleased to require in all His servants.

My dear cousin! one-half of the Christian world would call this madness, fanaticism, and folly; but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited, but in many others? If we have no communion with God here, surely we can expect none hereafter. A faith that

does not place our conversation in heaven ; that does not warm the heart and purify it too ; that does not, in short, govern our thought, word, and deed, is no faith, nor will it obtain for us any spiritual blessing here or hereafter. Let us see, therefore, my dear Cousin, that we do not deceive ourselves in a matter of such infinite moment. The world will be ever telling us that we are good enough, and the world will vilify us behind our backs. But it is not the world which tries the heart ; that is the prerogative of God alone. My dear Cousin, I have often prayed for you behind your back, and now I pray for you to your face. There are many who would not forgive me this wrong ; but I have known you so long and so well that I am not afraid of telling you how sincerely I wish for your growth in every Christian grace, in every thing that may promote and secure your everlasting welfare.

I am obliged to Mrs. Cowper for the book,<sup>1</sup> which, you perceive, arrived safe. I am willing to consider it as an intimation on her part that she would wish me to write to her, and shall do it accordingly. My circumstances are rather particular, such as call upon my friends, those, I mean, who are truly such, to take some little notice of me, and will naturally make those who are not such in sincerity rather shy of doing it. To this I impute the silence of many with regard to me, who, before the affliction that befel me, were ready enough to converse with me.—Yours ever,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Pearsall's *Meditations*.

## TO JOSEPH HILL.

*Huntingdon, March 10, 1766.*

MY DEAR SEPHUS,—I think the remainder of Dr. Cotton's account is 65 pounds. I should have advised the payment of it before this time, but the time of general payment advances apace, and I have been afraid of wanting money for other purposes. In the pleasant month of May I intend to discharge a half year's reckoning with Mrs. Unwin. Soon after that I shall have servants' wages to pay, and half a year's maintenance of a small youth whom I brought with me, by way of pensioner, from St. Albans. The whole amount of these three articles will be about 60 pounds. If, in these circumstances, and in this situation, you think I can afford to quit scores with the little Doctor, I shall be obliged to you if you will do it forthwith. You may contrive, when you send him the cash, to ask whether he is fully paid or no, and if not, how much remains due, and unsatisfied. More debts than money has been my distress this many a day, and is likely to continue so. I have not seen the new play, nor is my curiosity so much agog as one would have expected. We live much out of the theatrical sphere. My connection with Colman is probably at an end, and it would give me therefore more pain than pleasure to read his productions. I have seen the Epilogue and think it wonderfully silly. I ask Fanny's pardon, for I recollect it is Garrick's. My love to your family.—Yours, my dear Sephus,

WM. COWPER.

Remember me to my uncle when you see him.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, NEAR  
HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, at the Rev. Mr. Unwin's,*  
11th March 1766.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I am much obliged to you for Pearsall's *Meditations*, especially as it furnishes me with an occasion of writing to you, which is all I have waited for. My friends must excuse me, if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish me to be silent too; and my circumstances are such as not only justify that apprehension in point of prudence, but even make it natural.

I have great reason, my dear cousin, to be thankful to the gracious Providence that conducted me to this place. The lady in whose house I live is so excellent a person, and regards me with a friendship so truly Christian, that I could almost fancy my own mother restored to life again, to compensate to me for all the friends I have lost, and all my connections broken. She has a son at Cambridge in all respects worthy of such a mother, the most amiable young man I ever knew. His natural and acquired endowments are very considerable; and as to his virtues, I need only say that he is a Christian. It ought to be a matter of daily thanksgiving to me that I am admitted into the society of such persons; and I pray God to make me, and keep me, worthy of them.

My dear cousin, I am much altered since you saw me last. I have both suffered much and received great consolation. I was not then a Christian, whatever my partial friends might think me, but now I

trust, by the grace of God, I am one. I know what it is to assent with the head, and what it is to believe with the heart. Blessed be the God of all mercy that I have experienced both, and may He enable me to hold fast to that which is best. I doubt not there are many who have heard it surmised that I am become mighty religious, and perhaps that I am turned Methodist. Say aye! no great wonder. Distempers of that kind are apt to take such a turn; well, it may wear off in time perhaps, and if it should not, it's better than being confined. So reason they; but you, my dear cousin, well know that a religious turn is the gift of God. There is no true faith but what is of His operation, and they in whom by His Holy Spirit He has wrought it, understand this, though the world cannot understand them when they say so.

Your brother Martin has been very kind to me, having written to me twice in a style which, though it was once irksome to me, to say the least, I now know how to value. I pray God to forgive me the many light things I have both said and thought of him and his labours. Hereafter I shall consider him as a burning and a shining light, and as one of those 'who, having turned many to righteousness, shall shine hereafter as the stars for ever and ever.'

So much for the state of my heart; as to my spirits I am cheerful and happy, and having peace with God, have peace within myself. For the continuance of this blessing I trust to Him who gives it: and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded. My love to the Major and to all your family.—Believe me, my dear cousin, yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, AT THE CHANCERY OFFICE,  
LONDON

*April 3, 1766.*

MY DEAR SEPHUS,—I return you many thanks for the final settlement of my accounts with the little medical man of St. Albans. We have contrived between us to turn the tables upon him, and instead of a creditor he has become my debtor—not indeed in the money way, but the epistolary, having owed me a letter a long time. I correspond with the little man because I love him, and have great reason to do so. I should be glad if my uncle can find leisure, and it be not contrary to act of parliament, if he will be so good as to furnish me with half-a-dozen franks to Dr. Cotton and as many to yourself. Pray remember me to him very affectionately.

In my last I threatened you with draughts for the sum of £60. I shall draw for 20 of 'em in a day or two, and for the rest in May. A long cessation I hope will follow, and such as will be sufficient for the replenishment of my exhausted treasury.

I read a good deal, though I have neither read Colman or Sterne. I agree with you entirely in your judgment of the works of the latter, considered as moral performances, for the two first volumes of his sermons I read in London. He is a great master of the pathetic; and if that or any other species of rhetoric could renew the human heart and turn it from the power of Satan unto God, I know no writer better qualified to make proselytes to the cause of virtue than Sterne. But,

alas! my dear Joe, the evil of a corrupt nature is too deeply rooted in us all to be extirpated by the puny efforts of wit or genius. The way which God has appointed must be the true and the only way to virtue, and that is faith in Christ. He who has received that inestimable keeping deep into his heart, has received a principle of virtue that will never fail him. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, and there is no other. The world by wisdom knew not God, it therefore pleased Him by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. To save them from their sinful nature here and from His wrath hereafter, by that plain but despised and rejected remedy, faith in Christ. Therefore it is that though I admire Sterne as a man of genius, I can never admire him as a preacher. For to say the least of him, he mistakes the weapon of his warfare, and fights not with the sword of the Spirit for which only he was ordained a minister of the Gospel, but with that wisdom which shone with as effectual a light before our Saviour came as since, and which therefore cannot be the wisdom which He came to reveal to us.

My dear Joe! I love you heartily, and frequently since the discourse I had with you at Mr. Martin's, have wished with much fervency of true friendship for you that you might think daily and daily deeper of this only source of happiness either present or future. It is the warmest prayer I can form for any of my friends, and I form it for them all, that they may arrive at the knowledge and love of God through faith in His blessed Son. God is witness that upon this foundation is built all the happiness I enjoy, and that I never enjoyed anything that

deserved the name of happiness till it pleased Him to bestow that inestimable gift upon me. Pardon my preaching to you, but the hint you dropt in your letter seemed to require it. My love to your family.—Yours ever,

Wm. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*April 4, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I agree with you that letters are not essential to friendship; but they seem to be a natural fruit of it, when they are the only intercourse that can be had. And a friendship producing no sensible effects is so like indifference, that the appearance may easily deceive even an acute discerner. I retract however all that I said in my last upon this subject, having reason to suspect that it proceeded from a principle which I would discourage in myself upon all occasions, even a pride that felt itself hurt upon a mere suspicion of neglect, I have so much cause for humility, and so much need of it too, and every little sneaking resentment is such an enemy to it, that I hope I shall never give quarter to any thing that appears in the shape of sullenness, or self-consequence hereafter. Alas! if my best Friend, who laid down His life for me, were to remember all the instances in which I have neglected Him, and to plead them against me in judgment, where should I hide my guilty head in the day of recompense? I will pray therefore for blessings upon my friends even though they cease to be so, and upon my enemies though they continue such. The deceitfulness of the natural

heart is inconceivable. I know well that I passed upon my friends for a person at least religiously inclined, if not actually religious; and what is more wonderful, I thought myself a Christian, when I had no faith in Christ, when I saw no beauty in Him that I should desire Him; in short, when I had neither faith nor love, nor any Christian grace whatever, but a thousand seeds of rebellion instead, evermore springing up in enmity against Him. But blessed be God, even the God who is become my salvation, the hail of affliction and rebuke for sin has swept away the refuge of lies. It pleased the Almighty in great mercy to set all my misdeeds before me. At length, the storm being past, a quiet and peaceful serenity of soul succeeded, such as ever attends the gift of lively faith in the all-sufficient atonement, and the sweet sense of mercy and pardon purchased by the blood of Christ. Thus did He break me and bind me up; thus did He wound me, and His hands made me whole. My dear cousin, I make no apology for entertaining you with the history of my conversion, because I know you to be a Christian in the sterling import of the appellation. This is, however, but a very summary account of the matter, neither would a letter contain the astonishing particulars of it. If we ever meet again in this world, I will relate them to you by word of mouth; if not, they will serve for the subject of a conference in the next, where I doubt not I shall remember and record them with a gratitude better suited to the subject.—Yours, my dear cousin, affectionately,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*April 17, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—As in matters unattainable by reason, and unrevealed in the Scripture, it is impossible to argue at all; so, in matters concerning which reason can only give a probable guess, and the Scripture has made no explicit discovery, it is, though not impossible to argue at all, yet impossible to argue to any certain conclusion. This seems to me to be the very case with the point in question: reason is able to form many plausible conjectures concerning the possibility of our knowing each other in a future state; and the Scripture has, here and there, favoured us with an expression that looks at least like a slight intimation of it; but because a conjecture can never amount to a proof, and a slight intimation cannot be construed into a positive assertion, therefore I think we can never come to any absolute conclusion upon the subject. We may indeed reason about the plausibility of our conjectures, and we may discuss, with great industry and shrewdness of argument, those passages in the Scripture which seem to favour the opinion; but still, no certain means having been afforded us, no certain end can be attained; and after all that can be said, it will still be doubtful whether we shall know each other or not.

As to arguments founded upon human reason only, it would be easy to muster up a much greater number on the affirmative side of the question, than it would be worth my while to write, or yours to read. Let us see, therefore, what the Scripture says, or seems to say, towards the proof of it; and

of this kind of argument also I shall insert but a few of those which seem to me to be the fairest and clearest for the purpose. For, after all, a disputant on either side of this question is in danger of that censure of our blessed Lord's, ‘Ye do err, not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God.’

As to parables, I know it has been said, in the dispute concerning the intermediate state, that they are not argumentative; but this having been controverted by very wise and good men, and the parables of Dives and Lazarus having been used by such to prove an intermediate state, I see not why it may not be as fairly used for the proof of any other matter which it seems fairly to imply. In this parable we see that Dives is represented as knowing Lazarus, and Abraham as knowing them both, and the discourse between them is entirely concerning their respective characters and circumstances upon earth. Here, therefore, our Saviour seems to countenance the notion of a mutual knowledge and recollection; and if a soul that has perished shall know the soul that is saved, surely the heirs of salvation shall know and recollect each other.

In the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the second chapter, and nineteenth verse, St. Paul says, ‘What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy.’

As to the hope which the Apostle has formed concerning them, he himself refers the accomplishment of it to the coming of Christ, meaning that then he should receive the recompence of his labours in their behalf; his joy and glory he refers likewise to the same period, both which would result from

the sight of such numbers redeemed by the blessing of God upon his ministration, when he should present them before the great Judge, and say, in the words of a greater than himself, ‘Lo! I, and the children whom Thou hast given me.’ This seems to imply that the Apostle should know the converts, and the converts the Apostle, at least at the Day of Judgment; and if then, why not afterwards?

See also the fourth chapter of that epistle, verses 13, 14, 16, which I have not room to transcribe. Here the Apostle comforts them under their affliction for their deceased brethren, exhorting them ‘not to sorrow as without hope’; and what is the hope by which he teaches them to support their spirits? Even this, ‘that them which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with Him.’ In other words, and by a fair paraphrase surely, telling them they are only taken from them for a season, and that they should receive them at their resurrection.

If you can take off the force of these texts, my dear cousin, you will go a great way towards shaking my opinion; if not, I think they must go a great way towards shaking yours.

The reason why I did not send you my opinion of Pearsall was, because I had not then read him; I have read him since, and like him much, especially the latter part of him; but you have whetted my curiosity to see the last letter by tearing it out: unless you can give me a good reason why I should not see it, I shall inquire for the book the first time I go to Cambridge. Perhaps I may be partial to Hervey<sup>1</sup> for the sake of his other writings; but I

<sup>1</sup> James Hervey (1714-1758). Wrote *Meditations and Contemplations* in 1746, including his well-known *Meditations among the Tombs*.

1766]

TO MRS. COWPER

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cannot give Pearsall the preference to him, for I think him one of the most scriptural writers in the world.—Yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE,  
HERTFORD

*April 18, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—Having gone as far as I thought needful to justify the opinion of our meeting and knowing each other hereafter, I find, upon reflection, that I have done but half my business, and that one of the questions you proposed remains entirely unconsidered, viz., ‘Whether the things of our present state will not be of too low and mean a nature to engage our thoughts, or make a part of our communications in heaven.’

The common and ordinary occurrences of life, no doubt, and even the ties of kindred, and of all temporal interests, will be entirely discarded from amongst that happy society; and possibly even the remembrance of them done away. But it does not therefore follow that our spiritual concerns, even in this life, will be forgotten; neither do I think that they can ever appear trifling to us in any the most distant period of eternity. God, as you say in reference to the Scripture, will be all in all. But does not that expression mean that, being admitted to so near an approach to our heavenly Father and Redeemer, our whole nature, the soul and all its faculties, will be employed in praising and adoring Him? Doubtless, however, this will be the case; and if so, will it not furnish out a glorious theme of thanksgiving, to recollect ‘the rock whence we were

hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged"? to recollect the time when our faith, which under the tuition and nurture of the Holy Spirit has produced such a plentiful harvest of immortal bliss, was as a grain of mustard seed, small in itself, promising but little fruit, and producing less? to recollect the various attempts that were made upon it, by the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, and its various triumphs over all, by the assistance of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ? At present, whatever our convictions may be of the sinfulness and corruption of our nature, we can make but a very imperfect estimate either of our weakness or our guilt. Then, no doubt, we shall understand the full value of the wonderful salvation wrought out for us; and it seems reasonable to suppose that, in order to form a just idea of our redemption, we shall be able to form a just one of the danger we have escaped; when we know how weak and frail we were, surely we shall be more able to render due praise and honour to His strength who fought for us; when we know completely the hatefulness of sin in the sight of God, and how deeply we were tainted by it, we shall know how to value the blood by which we were cleansed as we ought. The twenty-four elders, in the fifth of the Revelations, give glory to God for their redemption out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. This surely implies a retrospect to their respective conditions upon earth, and that each remembered out of what particular kindred and nation he had been redeemed; and if so, then surely the minutest circumstance of their redemption did not escape their memory. They who triumph over the Beast, in the fifteenth chapter,

earth, under the guidance and direction of our Lord Jesus Christ, the subject of our mutual converse.'

Thus, my dear cousin, I have spread out my reasons before you for an opinion which, whether admitted or denied, affects not the state or interest of our soul. May our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, conduct us into His own Jerusalem; where there shall be no night, neither any darkness at all; where we shall be free even from innocent error, and perfect in the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.—Yours faithfully,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, AT THE CHANCERY OFFICE, LONDON,  
OR IN COOKE'S COURT, CAREY STREET, LINCOLN'S  
INN FIELDS

If not at either of the above places, to be forwarded  
to him immediately.

Aug. 16, 1766.

DEAR SEPHUS,—Uncertain whether or no this will ever reach your hands, I shall lay an embargo upon all that wit and humour which generally pours itself out in my epistles, and only write the needful.

I have a bill to pay here, and immediate occasion for cash besides. Twenty pounds will answer both these emergencies. I should be glad therefore, if my finances will stretch so far, of a bank note by the first opportunity to that amount.

I am much concerned to hear of Ashley's<sup>1</sup> illness. You will oblige me by sending me some account of him.—Yours, dear Joe,

W. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Father of Lady Hesketh.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*No date.*

DEAR SEPHUS,—I sent you a scrap this morning; but the post not being yet gone out, I shall trouble you with another scrap, upon the subject of yours which I have just received.

I am sorry my finances are not only exhausted, but overdrawn. This being the case, I shall choose to let the draper's bill<sup>1</sup> at this place remain unpaid a while longer, till cash comes in. I shall lower my demands therefore, and, instead of twenty pounds, must beg of you to convey to me five guineas for immediate use. My brother is gone into the North, with no more money than he wants, and will return, I suppose, wanting more than he has. I thought he had made out our account with Eamonson, for I charged him by letter, just before he set out for London, not to forget it.

These deficiencies of money frighten me, lest I should not be able to continue in this comfortable retreat, for I shall never, I doubt, find such another. Another half-year will be due to Mr. Unwin in November, which must be paid him at the time, if I sell the only hundred I have for the purpose. I was always good at selling. It has, as you say, been an expensive year: I shall hope better things of the next.

I rejoice with you in the snugness of your situation, and if you continue to like it, wish you may always continue to be in the same, or just such another.

My love attends your family.—Yours, dear Joe,  
W.M. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Peacock's. See 3rd July 1765, and 27th Oct. 1766.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, Sept. 3, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—It is reckoned, you know, a great achievement to silence an opponent in disputation; and your silence was of so long a continuance, that I might well begin to please myself with the apprehension of having accomplished so arduous a matter. To be serious, however, I am not sorry that what I have said concerning our knowledge of each other in a future state has a little inclined you to the affirmative. For though the redeemed of the Lord shall be sure of being as happy in that state as infinite power, employed by infinite goodness, can make them, and therefore it may seem immaterial whether we shall, or shall not, recollect each other hereafter, yet our present happiness at least is a little interested in the question. A parent, a friend, a wife, must needs, I think, feel a little heartache at the thought of an eternal separation from the objects of her regard; and not to know them, when she meets them in another life, or never to meet them at all, amounts, though not altogether, yet nearly to the same thing. Remember them I think she needs must. To hear that they are happy, will indeed be no small addition to her own felicity; but to see them so will surely be a greater. Thus at least it appears to our present human apprehension; consequently, therefore, to think that when we leave them we lose them for ever, that we must remain eternally ignorant whether they, that were flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, partake with us of celestial glory, or are disinherited of their heavenly portion, must shed a dismal gloom over all our

present connexions. For my own part, this life is such a momentary thing, and all its interests have so shrunk in my estimation, since by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ I became attentive to the things of another, that, like a worm in the bud of all my friendships and affections, this very thought would eat out the heart of them all, had I a thousand; and were their date to terminate with this life, I think I should have no inclination to cultivate and improve such a fugitive business. Yet friendship is necessary to our happiness here; and built upon Christian principles, upon which only it can stand, is a thing even of religious sanction;—for what is that love which the Holy Spirit, speaking by St. John, so much inculcates, but friendship? the only love which deserves the name; a love which can toil, and watch, and deny itself, and go to death for its brother. Worldly friendships are a poor weed compared with this; and even this union of spirit in the bond of peace would suffer, in my mind at least, could I think it were only coeval with our earthly mansions. It may possibly argue great weakness in me, in this instance, to stand so much in need of future hopes to support me in the discharge of present duty. But so it is:—I am far, I know, very far from being perfect in Christian love, or any other divine attainment, and am therefore unwilling to forego whatever may help me in my progress.

You are so kind as to inquire after my health, for which reason I must tell you what otherwise would not be worth mentioning, that I have lately been just enough indisposed to convince me that not only human life in general, but mine in particular, hangs by a slender thread. I am stout enough in appear-

ance, yet a little illness demolishes me. I have had a severe shake, and the building is not so firm as it was. But I bless God for it with all my heart. If the inner man be but strengthened day by day, as, I hope, under the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost it will be, no matter how soon the outward is dissolved. He who has in a manner raised me from the dead, in a literal sense, has given me the grace, I trust, to be ready at the shortest notice to surrender up to Him that life which I have twice received from Him. Whether I live or die, I desire it may be to His glory, and it must be to my happiness. I thank God that I have those amongst my kindred to whom I can write without reserve my sentiments upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject is more insipid to me than ever my task was when a schoolboy; and I say not this in vain glory, God forbid! but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me, the chief of sinners. Once He was a terror to me, and His service, oh what a weariness it was! Now I can say I love Him and His holy name, and I am never so happy as when I speak of His mercies to me.—Yours, dear cousin,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*October 9, 1766.*

DEAR JOE,—It would be rather an unreasonable proceeding, methinks, to trouble you so frequently as I do with my paltry affairs, and by way of recompence to make use of your money without remembering to restore it. That I may act therefore more in character as a reasonable being, I desire you will

be so kind as to send me a letter of attorney to empower you to sell as much of the hundred pounds as my arrears with you amount to. Mr. Unwin's forty guineas will be due on the 11th of November. If my treasury has been sufficiently replenished to answer that demand, or is likely to be so before the time mentioned, well and good. If not, I must beg you to despatch the whole hundred pounds, that the money may be forthcoming. My draper's bill, amounting to about fourteen pounds, I shall endeavour to discharge out of my right breeches pocket, which I hope will be rich enough for the purpose.

My brother is returned from Yorkshire, and will send you a copy of our account with Eamonsen. He thought he had given you one when he saw you in town, having written it out for that purpose; but certainly forgot it, as he did his great coat, which he has left at an inn upon the north road, besides having with the same noble contempt of wealth and self-interest, accepted half a moidore from an inn-keeper, made of tin, and not worth a penny. I laugh at his carelessness, and so does he. Whether laughing at it be the way to cure it, time will show.

I direct this to your office lest it should not find you at Taplow. My love to your family, and believe me ever yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, October 20, 1766.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I am very sorry for poor Charles's illness, and hope you will soon have cause to thank God for his complete recovery. We have an epidemical fever in this country likewise, which

leaves behind it a continual sighing, almost to suffocation ; not that I have seen any instance of it, for, blessed be God ! our family have hitherto escaped it, but such was the account I heard of it this morning.

I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here.

- As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none ; the place indeed swarms with them, and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we do not spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine ; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries ; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day ; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where with Mrs. Unwin and her son I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's<sup>1</sup> collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Martin Madan had musical skill. He composed the tune 'Helmsley,' 'Lo ! He comes with clouds descending.'

tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and 'most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and last of all, the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life; above all, for a heart to like it.

I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders, and I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularise, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it; indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the meantime, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and I hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman.—  
Yours ever, my dear cousin,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL •

*Huntingdon, October 27, 1766.*

DEAR SEPHUS,—If every dealer and chapman was connected with creditors like you, the poor commissioners of bankrupts would be ruined. I can only wonder at you, considering my knack at running in debt, and my slender ability to pay. After all, I am afraid that the poor stock must suffer. When I wrote my last, the payment of my boy's board was farther distant, therefore I suppose it was that I did not mention it. Mr. Peacock's bill<sup>1</sup> too being a growing evil, though at that time I thought of paying it out of my pocket, must I find receive its satisfaction from another quarter. The former of these demands amounts to about six pounds, and the latter to about sixteen, and has waited so long for payment that in a little time my credit and interest in that gentleman will begin to totter. My finances will never be able to satisfy these craving necessities, without leaving my debt to you entirely unsatisfied. And though I know you are sincere in what you say, and as willing to wait for your money as heart can wish, yet *quære*, whether the next half year, which will bring its expenses with it, will be more propitious to you than the present? The succeeding half years may bear a close resemblance to their insolvent predecessors continually; and unless we break bank some time or other, your proposal of payment may be always what it is at present. What matters it, therefore, to reprieve the stock, which must come to execution at last?

I am heartily glad my uncle<sup>2</sup> has recovered his

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 27 and 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Cowper.

spirits ; and desire you will remember me to all your associates at Taplow. I sympathise with you upon the fugitive nature of the longest vacation, and wish, for your sake, that the chancellor would pack up his great seal, and hold his court in your neighbourhood.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Huntingdon, Nov. 12, 1766.*

DEAR SEPHUS,—I drew yesterday for Mr. Unwin's money, and when I have drawn about six pounds more for the young gentleman's maintenance whose birth and parentage you inquire after, I shall have drawn my last for the present.

He<sup>1</sup> is the son of a drunken cobbler at St. Albans, who would probably have starved him to death by this time, or have poisoned him with gin, if Providence had not thrown him in my way to rescue him. I was glad of an opportunity to show some mercy in a place where I had received so much ; and hope God will give a blessing to my endeavours to preserve him. He is a fine boy, of a good temper and understanding ; and if the notice that is taken of him by the neighbourhood do not spoil him, will probably turn out well : for further particulars inquire of Dr. Cotton.

At present I have thoughts of dealing with him much after the same manner, when he is a year or two older, as with my present servant. He will be about nine years of age when my man leaves me ; at which time I think of taking him into my service, for he will be old enough to do all the

<sup>1</sup> Dick Coleman, Cowper's protégé.

business for which I shall want him, and of a right age to be taught the trade and mystery of a breeches-maker. This, though not so cheap a way as keeping no servant, will yet be a considerable saving to me, for I shall have but one to maintain instead of two; and in the meantime an advantage will result from it, not to be overlooked, the securing him, I mean, from ill examples and bad company, which, if I turn him quite loose into another family, cannot be so easily done. But, after all, my measures in this instance, and in all others, are precarious things, because my income is so. But God will order all for the best.

I am sorry my uncle's disorder still hangs about him. The grief of a wounded spirit is of all the most dreadful. Give my sincere love to your family and all my friends, and believe me, dear Joe,  
yours very affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO LADY HESKETH

*Huntingdon, Jan. 30, 1767.*

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH,—I am glad you spent your summer in a place so agreeable to you. As to me, my lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present: our bridges shaken almost in pieces; our poor willows torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat. Yet even here we are happy; at least I am so; and if I have no groves with benches conveniently disposed, nor commons overgrown with thyme to regale me,

neither do I want them. You thought to make my mouth water at the charms of Taplow, but you see you are disappointed.

My dear cousin! I am a living man; and I can never reflect that I am so without recollecting at the same time that I have infinite cause of thanksgiving and joy. This makes every place delightful to me, where I can have leisure to meditate upon those mercies by which I live, and indulge a vein of gratitude to that gracious God who has snatched me like a brand out of the burning. Where had I been but for His forbearance and long suffering? even with those who shall never see His face in hope, to whom the name of Jesus, by the just judgment of God, is become a torment instead of a remedy. Thoughtless and inconsiderate wretch that I was! I lived as if I had been my own creator, and could continue my existence to what length, and in what state I pleased; as if dissipation was the narrow way which leads to life, and a neglect of the blessed God would certainly end in the enjoyment of Him. But it pleased the Almighty to convince me of my fatal error before it indeed became such; to convince me that in communion with Him we may find that happiness for which we were created, and that a life without God in the world is a life of trash, and the most miserable delusion. Oh how had my own corruptions, and Satan together, blinded and befooled me! I thought the service of my Maker and Redeemer a tedious and unnecessary labour; I despised those who thought otherwise; and if they spoke of the love of God, I pronounced them madmen. As if it were possible to serve and to love the Almighty

Being too much, with whom we must dwell for ever, or be for ever miserable without Him.

Would I were the only one that had ever dreamed this dream of folly and wickedness! but the world is filled with such, who furnish a continual proof of God's almost unprovokable mercy; who set up for themselves in a spirit of independence upon Him who made them, and yet enjoy that life by His bounty, which they abuse to His dishonour. You remember me, my dear cousin, one of this trifling and deluded multitude. Great and grievous afflictions were applied to awaken me out of this deep sleep, and, under the influence of divine grace, have, I trust, produced the effect for which they were intended. If the way in which I had till that time proceeded had been according to the word and will of God, God had never interposed to change it. That He did is certain; though others may not be so sensible of that interposition, yet I am sure of it. To think as I once did therefore must be wrong. Whether to think as I now do be right or not, is a question that can only be decided by the word of God; at least it is capable of no other decision, till the great day determine it finally. I see, and see plainly, in every page and period of that word, my former heedlessness and forgetfulness of God condemned. I see a life of union and communion with him inculcated and enjoined as an essential requisite. To this, therefore, it must be the business of our lives to attain, and happy is he who makes the greatest progress in it. This is no fable, but it is our life. If we stand at the left hand of Christ while we live, we shall stand there too in the judgment. The separation must be begun in this world,

which in that day shall be made for ever. My dear cousin! may the Son of God, who shall then assign to each his everlasting station, direct and settle all your thoughts upon this important subject. Whether you must think as I do, or not, is not the question; but it is indeed an awful question, whether the word of God be the rule of our actions, and His Spirit the principle by which we act. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye believe ye have eternal life.

This letter will be Mr. Howe's<sup>1</sup> companion to London. I wish his company were more worthy of him, but it is not fit it should be less. I pray God to bless you, and remember you where I never forget those I love.—Yours and Sir Thomas's affectionate friend,

Wm. Cowper.

TO MRS. COWPER

*Huntingdon, March 11, 1767.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—To find those whom I love clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any that this world can afford me. Judge then, whether your letter, in which the body and substance of a saving faith is so evidently set forth, could meet with a lukewarm reception at my hands, or be entertained with indifference! Would you know the true reason of my long silence? Conscious that my religious principles are generally excepted against, and that the conduct they produce, wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the object of disapprobation than those principles themselves; and remembering

<sup>1</sup> Probably some work of Howe's.

that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear assurance that our faith in Jesus was of the same stamp and character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my sentiments and practice; that you might think the one unsupported by Scripture, and the other whimsical and unnecessarily strict and rigorous, and consequently would be rather pleased with the suspension of a correspondence, which a different way of thinking upon so momentous a subject as that we wrote upon was likely to render tedious and irksome to you.

I have told you the truth from my heart; forgive me these injurious suspicions, and never imagine that I shall hear from you upon this delightful theme without a real joy, or without prayer to God to prosper you in the way of His truth—His sanctifying and saving truth. The book you mention lies now upon my table. Marshall is an old acquaintance of mine: I have both read him and heard him read with pleasure and edification. The doctrines he maintains are, under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, the very life of my soul, and the soul of all my happiness: that Jesus is a present Saviour from the guilt of sin by His most precious blood, and from the power of it by His Spirit; that corrupt and wretched in ourselves, in Him, and in Him only, we are complete; that being united to Jesus by a lively faith, we have a solid and eternal interest in His obedience and sufferings, to justify us before the face of our heavenly Father; and that all this inestimable treasure, the earnest of which is in grace, and its consummation in glory, is given, freely given to us of God; in short, that He hath

opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. These are the truths which, by the grace of God, shall ever be dearer to me than life itself; shall ever be placed next my heart, as the throne whereon the Saviour Himself shall sit, to sway all its motions, and reduce that world of iniquity and rebellion to a state of filial and affectionate obedience to the will of the Most Holy.

These, my dear cousin, are the truths, to which by nature we are enemies. They debase the sinner, and exalt the Saviour, to a degree which the pride of our hearts (till Almighty grace subdues them) is determined never to allow. May the Almighty reveal His Son in our hearts continually more and more, and teach us to increase in love towards Him continually, for having given us the unspeakable riches of Christ!—Yours faithfully,

W. C.

## TO MRS. COWPER

*Huntingdon, March 14, 1767.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I just add a line by way of postscript to my last, to apprise you of the arrival of a very dear friend of mine at the Park on Friday next, the son of Mr. Unwin, whom I have desired to call on you, in his way from London to Huntingdon. If you knew him as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me, and knows my whole story from first to last. I give you this previous notice, because I know you are not fond

of strange faces, and because I thought it would in some degree save him the pain of announcing himself.

I am become a great florist and shrub-doctor. If the Major can make up a small packet of seeds that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honeysuckle, such a packet I mean as may be put in one's fob, I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such however as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare.

I think Marshall one of the best writers, and the most spiritual expositor of Scripture I ever read. I admire the strength of his argument, and the clearness of his reasonings, upon those parts of our most holy religion which are generally least understood (even by real Christians) as masterpieces of the kind. His section upon the union of the soul with Christ is an instance of what I mean, in which he has spoken of a most mysterious truth with admirable perspicuity, and with great good sense, making it all the while subservient to his main purport of proving holiness to be the fruit and effect of faith.

I subjoin thus much upon that author, because, though you desired my opinion of him, I remember that in my last I rather left you to find it out by inference, than expressed it as I ought to have done. I never met with a man who understood the plan of salvation better, or was more happy in explaining it.

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, April 3, 1767.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—You sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with every thing he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at — the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect at first that pride and vain glory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered in that fruitful soil the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place whence I came, and to whom I belong.

Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and had since that time received more convincing proofs of my sponsibility, yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connections; that when he hears me called ‘That fellow Cowper,’ which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh pride! pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about, to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our

Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and goodwill. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger, and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper, will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But in good truth it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name. How should such a creature be admitted into those pure and sinless mansions, where nothing shall enter that defileth, did not the blood of Christ, applied by the hand of faith, take away the guilt of sin, and leave no spot or stain behind it? Oh what continual need have I of an Almighty, All-sufficient Saviour! I am glad you are acquainted so particularly with all the circumstances of my story, for I know that your secrecy and discretion may be trusted with any thing. A thread of mercy ran through all the intricate maze of those afflictive providences, so mysterious to myself at the time, and which must ever remain so to all, who will not see what was the great design of them; at the judgment-seat of Christ the whole shall be laid open. How is the rod of iron changed into a sceptre of love!

I thank you for the seeds; I have committed some of each sort to the ground, whence they will soon spring up like so many mementoes to remind me of my friends at the Park.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Huntingdon, May 14, 1767.*

DEAR JOE,—I only know that I was once the happy owner of a red-leather trunk, and that my

brother, when I first saw him at Cambridge, upon my inquiring after my papers, &c., told me that in a red-leather trunk they were all safely deposited. The whole contents of it are little worth ; and if I never see them more, I shall be but very moderately afflicted by the loss, though I fancy the trunk upon the road will prove to be the very trunk in question.

Together with your letter came a bill from my quondam hosier, in Fleet Street, Mr. Reynolds, for the sum of two pounds ten shillings, desiring present payment, cash being scarce. I sent him an order for the money by this day's post. My future expenses in the hosiery way will be small, for Mrs. Unwin knits all my stockings, and would knit my hats too, if that were possible.

I imagine my brother will be in town about mid-summer, when he will be able to confer with you upon the subject of the inexorable Mr. Eamonson, more to the purpose than I can by letter.

Having commenced gardener, I study the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting ; and enterprise everything in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in, and, were we twenty miles nearer London, I might turn higgler, and serve your honour with cauliflowers, and broccoli, at the best hand. I shall possibly now and then desire you to call at the seed-shop, in your way to Westminster, though sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law<sup>1</sup> at Berkhamstead—Yours, dear Joe,

W.M. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Referring to Cowper's step-mother, Rebecca Cowper. See note p. 102.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Huntingdon, June 16, 1767.*

DEAR JOE.—This part of the world is not productive of much news, unless the coldness of the weather be so, which is excessive for the season. We expect, or rather experience, a warm contest between the candidates for the county: the preliminary movements of bribery, threatening, and drunkenness, being already taken. The Sandwich interest seems to shake, though both parties are very sanguine. Lord Carysfort is supposed to be in great jeopardy, though as yet, I imagine, a clear judgment cannot be formed: for a man may have all the noise on his side, and yet lose his election. You know me to be an uninterested person, and I am sure I am a very ignorant one in things of this kind. I only wish it was over, for it occasions the most detestable scene of profligacy and riot that can be imagined.—Yours ever,

Wm. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER, AT THE PARK HOUSE, HERTFORD

*Huntingdon, July 13, 1767.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin being flung from his horse, as he was going to his cure on Sunday morning,<sup>1</sup> received a dreadful fracture on the back part of his skull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off. He died in a poor cottage,

<sup>1</sup> 28th June 1767.

to which he was carried immediately after his fall about a mile from home ; and his body could not be brought to his house till the spirit was gone to Him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day nor the hour when our Lord cometh !

The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son.

By this afflictive Providence it has pleased God, who always drops comfort into the bitterest cup, to open a door for us out of an unevangelical pasture, such as this is, into some better ministry where we may hear the glad tidings of salvation, and be nourished by the sincere milk of the Word. We know not yet where we shall settle, but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley in Yorkshire,<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us, but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my Aunt Madan,<sup>2</sup> to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries. It is probable we shall stay here till Michaelmas. I beg my affectionate respects to Mr. Cowper and all your family, and am, my dear cousin, your affectionate friend and servant,

W.M. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. T. Haweis and Dr. Richard Conyers, Evangelical divines.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Cowper, the Court beauty, Pope's 'Erinna.'

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Huntingdon, July 16, 1767.*

DEAR JOE,—Your wishes that the newspapers may have misinformed you are vain. Mr. Unwin is dead, and died in the manner there mentioned. At nine o'clock on Sunday morning he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us; and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a flock bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense that were indulged him he spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Saviour. To that strong-hold we must all resort at last, if we would have hope in our death; when every other refuge fails, we are glad to fly to the only shelter, to which we can repair to any purpose; and happy is it for us when, the false ground we have chosen for ourselves being broken under us, we find ourselves obliged to have recourse to the rock which can never be shaken. When this is our lot, we receive great and undeserved mercy.

Our society will not break up, but we shall settle in some other place; where, is at present uncertain.—  
Yours,

W. C.

#### THE REMOVAL TO OLNEY

The chief desire of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin was to settle in some town where they would be under

an Evangelical minister. Finally they decided on Olney, of which the Rev. John Newton<sup>1</sup> had been curate since 1764. The Vicar of Olney, the Rev. Moses Browne, resided at Blackheath. John Newton, 'Olney's bold apostle,' was a great and noble character. He has obtained fame, not only as the friend of Cowper, but also as one of the leading divines of the eighteenth century revival; as a hymn-writer—the best of his hymns, e.g., 'How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds!' being of the highest merit; and as the writer of that charming book, *Letters to a Wife*. Of this book Edward FitzGerald says that it 'contains some of the most beautiful things I ever read: fine feeling in fine English.' A poet, a wit, and a man of a warm heart, he was precisely the companion for the poetical, witty, and affectionate Cowper. Newton's devotion to Cowper during the derangement of 1778 is one of the most beautiful incidents in literary history. Newton and his wife were a second Pliny and Calphurnia.

Olney, a town of some three thousand inhabitants, situated in the north of Buckinghamshire, owes its fame chiefly to the connection with it of Cowper and Newton; and its intimate associations with the great religious revival of the eighteenth century, and the influx of pilgrims on that account, have caused it to be called 'The Evangelical Mecca.' The house at Olney in which Cowper resided for nineteen years was, on April 25, 1900, the centenary of Cowper's death, presented to the town and the nation by Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Six letters of Newton to Cowper are given in *Letters by the Rev. John Newton*, edited by Rev. Josiah Bull, (Religious Tract Society), the first bearing date 30th July 1767, the last 11th March 1786.

W. H. Collingridge. The Cowper and Newton Museum, as it is now called, contains a splendidly rich collection of Cowper and Newton relics and manuscripts.

#### IV. AT OLNEY

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Sept. 21, 1767.*

MY DEAR JOE,—I return you thanks for your information in the law matter, and shall be obliged to you for further assurances when you can consult your authorities.

Many more thanks are due to you for the tender and friendly manner in which you bring me acquainted with the distress that attends my circumstances. I beg, my friend, that you will no longer make any objection to the sale of the hundred pounds. I cannot be easy till that is done; my peace of mind is concerned in it. Not because I suspect you of the least anxiety about payment, but because I abhor the thought of trespassing upon the goodness of a faithful friend. My brother has a letter of attorney already to empower him to receive the interest; but I believe it extends no further. Send me one therefore to empower you to sell the principal, and I shall be easy: as to any future exigencies I am entirely so. My expenses hereafter will be so much reduced in some capital articles, that I have not the least remaining doubt but that the income of my future years will be much more than sufficient for the demands of them. I might say something of this sort before, perhaps unadvisedly, and the event proves it to have been

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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so ; but now I say it upon good warrant, and cannot be mistaken.

I could wish, if it can be so managed, that the sale of the stock might be kept secret from my family, because it would probably alarm their fears upon my account, and possibly once more awaken their resentment. But the Lord's will be done, whatever it be. If they must know it, you will do me the kindness to assure them from me, that I have taken such order about my circumstances as that there can be no danger of exceeding them hereafter. Only I beg to be excused descending to particulars. Once more I entreat it as a favour, and shall consider it as a new proof of your attention to my happiness, that you will consent to the sale of the stock, and take measures for that purpose immediately. It cannot possibly be an inconvenience to me, nor can I possibly, in any emergency whatever, make a better use of it. My love to your mother and sisters.—Yours ever,

W.M. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Oct. 10, 1767.*

DEAR JOE,—I am obliged to you for complying with my request, and shall be glad to have the matter expedited as fast as may be.

One more law question ; and I believe the last—A man holds lands in right of his wife, the rents payable half-yearly, viz. at Lady-day and Michaelmas, dies in July. Are not the rising rents the property of the widow ? I mean, the rent of the whole last half-year. You are a better counsellor than I was,

but I think you have much such a client in me as I had in Dick Harcourt. Much good may you do with me !

Neither have I any map to consult, at present, but by what remembrance I have of the situation of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northern-most point of the county. We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell. I am willing to suspect that you make this inquiry with a view to an interview, when time shall serve. We may possibly be settled in our own house in about a month, where so good a friend of mine will be extremely welcome to Mrs. Unwin. We shall have a bed, and a warm fireside, at your service, if you can come before next summer; and if not, a parlour that looks the north wind full in the face, where you may be as cool as in the groves of Valombrosa.—Yours, my dear Sephus, affectionately ever,

Wm. COWPER.

*P.S.*—The stock is in the three per cent. consols. You may send the letter of attorney by the waggon from The 'George' in Smithfield. It sets out on Tuesday morning early. But upon recollection, it had better come by the post.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Nov. 10, 1767.*

DEAR JOE,—Inclosed you have the letter of attorney. I shall be glad if you will find an opportunity of sending me six guineas, in a parcel by the Olney waggon, which sets out from 'The George' in Smithfield early on Tuesday morning, therefore it must be sent to the inn on Monday night.

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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It seems to me, though it did not occur to me at first, that you may be drawn into circumstances disagreeable to your delicacy by being laid under the restraint of secrecy with respect to the sale of this money. I desire therefore that if any questions are asked about the manner in which my arrears to you have been discharged, you will declare it at once.—  
Yours sincerely,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 21, 1768.*

DEAR SEPHUS,—The notes arrived safe last night. We rejoice that the venison proved good. Pray send me word in your next whether Grainger the tailor is dead or alive. So much for the needful. You are always busy, and I am just going to be so, which will make brevity and conciseness convenient to us both.—Yours faithfully and truly,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*May 3, 1768.*

DEAR JOE,—I shall be obliged to you if you will send me a ten pound note by the first opportunity, and at the same time I shall be glad to be informed of the state of my finances. The last time I wrote I begged you would be so good as to tell me whether Grainger is to be found above ground or no ; if he is, whether he lives where he did, or has changed his dwelling ; and if not, where his executors, administrators, or assigns, are to be met with. You will oblige me too, and so will your

little tiny mother, if you will favour me with Mrs. Rebecca Cowper's<sup>1</sup> receipt to pickle cabbage. My respects wait on her and your sisters, viz. your mother, not mine. You will ascribe my dryness and conciseness in the epistolary way to almost a total disuse of my pen. My youth and my scribbling vein are gone together, and unless they had been better employed it is fit they should.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, May 7, 1768.*

DEAR JOE,—Thanks for the receipt and for the note. When you come this way next, I hope your business will not be so impatient. We can show you a beautiful country, though not much celebrated in song, and a fine long town, pretty clean in summer-time, and full of poor folks. My love to Mrs. Doe, and thanks for the exercise of her transcribing abilities, not forgetting the rest of your household.

I shall want to draw for eighty pounds next month, and intend to leave the remainder by way of nest egg.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, June 16, 1768.*

DEAR JOE,—I thank you for so full an answer to so empty an epistle. If Olney furnished any thing for your amusement, you should have it in return;

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's step-mother. She died at Bath July 31, 1762, and was buried in the Abbey, where there is a tablet to her memory.



but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas.

I visited St. Albans about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor transient half-spent life so insipid and unaffected, that I have no heart to think or write much about them. Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes<sup>1</sup> or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes and believes that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God. I thank Him, that He has given me such a deep impressed persuasion of this awful truth, as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light.—

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO MRS. MADAN, STAFFORD ROW, NEAR THE QUEEN'S  
HORSE, WESTMINSTER

*Olney, June 28, 1768.*

MY DEAR AUNT,—I write once more to thank you on my own behalf and Mrs. Unwin's for negotiating this affair for us. John will be sent over to meet the maid at Newport on Saturday, and will bring her hither behind him.

I think I write to you with an aching heart upon my poor brother's account. He is with us, and his presence necessarily gives a turn to the conversation that we have not been used to. So much said about nothing, and so little said about Jesus, is very

<sup>1</sup> John Wilkes (1727-1797), then fighting the Middlesex election.

painful to us, but what can be done? May the good Lord make me thankful that He has given me, I trust, an understanding to know Him that is true, and may He in His due time afford me an occasion of thanking Him for the same unspeakable mercy bestowed upon my brother. He is going with us this evening to a prayer meeting at the vicarage, and we shall have two sermons preached here in the course of the week. Oh that his ears may be unstopped, and his eyes opened to the things that concern his peace.

My dear aunt, praise the Redeemer on my account, for teaching me and breaking the snares of the Enemy, and chastening me for my good. I have been much afflicted of late, and have been able to say with a burning heart, It is good for me that I was afflicted. I see plainly that the good Shepherd watches over me and keeps me every moment.—Yours ever in a kind and gracious Redeemer,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Oct. 20, 1768.

DEAR JOE,—By this time, I presume, you are returned to the precincts of the law. The latter end of October, I know, generally puts an end to your relaxations; such as reading upon sunshiny banks, and contemplating the clouds, as you lie upon your back.

Permit it to be one of the *aliena negotia centum*, which are now beginning to buzz in your ears, to send me a twenty pound note by the first opportunity. I beg my affectionate respects to my

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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friends in Cook's Court,<sup>1</sup> and am, dear Sephus,  
yours sincerely,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Jan. 21, 1769.*

DEAR JOE,—I rejoice with you in your recovery, and that you have escaped from the hands of one from whose hands you will not always escape. Death is either the most formidable, or the most comfortable thing we have in prospect, on this side of eternity. To be brought near to him, and to discern neither of these features in his face, would argue a degree of insensibility, of which I will not suspect my friend, whom I know to be a thinking man. You have been brought down to the side of the grave, and you have been raised again by Him who has the keys of the invisible world ; who opens and none can shut, who shuts and none can open. I do not forget to return thanks to Him on your behalf, and to pray that your life, which He has spared, may be devoted to His service. ‘Behold ! I stand at the door and knock,’ is the word of Him on whom both our mortal and immortal life depend, and, blessed be His Name, it is the word of one who wounds only that He may heal, and who waits to be gracious. The language of every such dispensation is, ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ It speaks with the voice of mercy and goodness, for, without such notices, whatever preparation we might make for other events, we should make none for this. My dear friend, I desire and pray that, when this last enemy shall come to execute an *unlimited*

<sup>1</sup> Cooke's Court, Carey Street, where Hill lived.

commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded faith in His name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon His cross.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, January 29, 1769.*

MY DEAR JOE,—I have a moment to spare, to tell you that your letter is just come to hand, and to thank you for it. I do assure you, the gentleness and candour of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition, which would have provoked many to anger. I have not time to add more, except just to hint that, if I am ever enabled to look forward to death with comfort, which, I thank God, is sometimes the case with me, I do not take my view of it from the top of my own works<sup>1</sup> and deservings, though God is witness that the labour of my life is to keep a conscience void of offence towards Him. Death is always formidable to me but when I see him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Christ Jesus.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 31, 1769.*

DEAR JOE,—Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper,<sup>2</sup> for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world.

<sup>1</sup> In the April of this year, 1769, prayer meetings were commenced by the Rev. John Newton in the 'great room of the great house,' a mansion near the church. Cowper often took part in them, and wrote several hymns for the use of the worshippers.

<sup>2</sup> Later he was called 'the Esq.'—in Teedon's *Diary*, for example.

Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, ‘How much one man differs from another !’ This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation ; but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours, I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your affectionate friend and servant,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I have not been behindhand in reproaching myself with neglect, but desire to take shame to myself for my unprofitableness in this, as well as in all other respects. I take the next immediate opportunity, however, of thanking you for yours, and of assuring you that, instead of being surprised at your silence, I rather wonder that you, or any of my friends, have any room left for so careless and negligent a correspondent in your

memories. I am obliged to you for the intelligence you send me of my kindred, and rejoice to hear of their welfare. He who settles the bounds of our habitations has at length cast our lot at a great distance from each other; but I do not therefore forget their former kindness to me, or cease to be interested in their wellbeing. You live in the centre of a world I know you do not delight in. Happy are you, my dear friend, in being able to discern the insufficiency of all it can afford to fill and satisfy the desires of an immortal soul. That God who created us for the enjoyment of Himself has determined in mercy that it shall fail us here, in order that the blessed result of all our inquiries after happiness in the creature may be a warm pursuit and a close attachment to our true interest, in fellowship and communion with Him, through the name and mediation of a dear Redeemer. I bless His goodness and grace, that I have any reason to hope I am a partaker with you in the desire after better things, than are to be found in a world polluted with sin, and therefore devoted to destruction. May He enable us both to consider our present life in its only true light, as an opportunity put into our hands to glorify Him amongst men, by a conduct suited to His word and will. I am miserably defective in this holy and blessed art; but I hope there is at the bottom of all my sinful infirmities a sincere desire to live just so long as I may be enabled, in some poor measure, to answer the end of my existence in this respect, and then to obey the summons, and attend Him in a world where they who are His servants here shall pay Him an unsinful obedience for ever. Your dear mother is too good to me, and puts a

more charitable construction upon my silence than the fact will warrant. I am not better employed than I should be in corresponding with her. I have that within which hinders me wretchedly in every thing that I ought to do, but is prone to trifle, and let time and every good thing run to waste. I hope however to write to her soon.

My love and best wishes attend Mr. Cowper, and all that inquire after me. May God be with you, to bless you, and do you good by all His dispensations; don't forget me when you are speaking to our best Friend before His mercy-seat.—Yours ever,

W. C.

N.B. I am not married.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, August 5, 1769.*

DEAR JOE,—The note came safe.

My brother left us last Saturday, and is now I suppose refreshing his lungs with the pure air which blows upon the Welsh mountains; if indeed his lungs, which have been so long used to the fogs of Alma Mater, can be refreshed by the thin atmosphere of Snowdon or Plinlimmon.

I find that the vacancy I left at St. Albans is filled up by a near relation. May the same Hand which struck off my fetters deliver her also out of the House of Bondage; and may she say when she comes forth, what I hope to be able to say from my heart, while I have breath to utter it—It is good for me that I was afflicted.—Yours, my dear Joe, with my love to all who enquire after me,

WM. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER

*Olney, August 31, 1769.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—A letter from your brother Frederick brought me yesterday the most afflicting intelligence that has reached me these many years. I pray to God to comfort you, and to enable you to sustain this heavy stroke with that resignation to His will, which none but Himself can give, and which He gives to none but His own children. How blessed and happy is your lot, my dear friend, beyond the common lot of the greater part of mankind; that you know what it is to draw near to God in prayer, and are acquainted with a Throne of Grace! You have resources in the infinite love of a dear Redeemer, which are withheld from millions: and the promises of God, which are Yea and Amen in Jesus, are sufficient to answer all your necessities, and to sweeten the bitterest cup which your heavenly Father will ever put into your hand. May He now give you liberty to drink at these wells of salvation, till you are filled with consolation and peace in the midst of trouble! He has said, When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, and when through the floods, they shall not overflow thee. You have need of such a word as this, and He knows your need of it, and the time of necessity is the time when He will be sure to appear in behalf of those who trust in Him. I bear you and yours upon my heart before Him night and day, for I never expect to hear of distress which shall call upon me with a louder voice to pray for the sufferer. I know the Lord hears me for myself, vile and sinful as I am, and believe and am sure that He will hear me for

you also. He is the Friend of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless, even God in His holy habitation; in all our afflictions He is afflicted, and chastens us in mercy. Surely He will sanctify this dispensation to you, do you great and everlasting good by it, make the world appear like dust and vanity in your sight, as it truly is, and open to your view the glories of a better country, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor pain, but God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes for ever. O that comfortable word! ‘I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction’: so that our very sorrows are evidences of our calling, and He chastens us, because we are his children.

My dear cousin, I commit you to the word of his Grace, and to the comforts of His Holy Spirit. Your life is needful for your family; may God in mercy to them prolong it, and may He preserve you from the dangerous effects, which a stroke like this might have upon a frame so tender as yours. I grieve with you, I pray for you; could I do more I would, but God must comfort you.—Yours, in our dear Lord Jesus,

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 20, 1770.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—The newspapers informed me last week that the Society of the Middle Temple were come to a resolution that no more chambers should be sold with a power of assignment, and that this resolution would speedily become a law. If this be the case, it were better that mine were sold immediately, for it will never be worth my while to keep them till they shall want considerable repairs,

they must before many years are passed ; and to sell them after this alteration takes place upon terms so much less valuable than those upon which I bought them, will be to lose half my money, unless the Inn is disposed to make up the difference.

I have been in treaty with Colonel Cowper about the sale of my Law Books, and I desired him to pay the purchase money into your hands. If it is done, I shall be glad to receive it.—Yours, dear Joe, affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Feb. 10, 1770.*

DEAR JOE,—I wrote to you about a fortnight since about my chambers, and desiring you, if I have any money in town, to send it. The last post brought me word from Cambridge that my brother is very ill, and it may be absolutely necessary for me to go over to him next week. His disorder is supposed to be owing to an inward decay, the consequence of a violent hæmorrhage he had in the autumn. Nothing is so likely to prevent my journey at present, as the want of money to defray the expenses of it. I shall be glad of an immediate answer whether I have any money in your hands or not, that if I have none, I may furnish myself with it as I can.—Yours, dear Joe, with much affection,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Feb. 15, 1770.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—I thank you for the notes which I received yesterday, ten pounds, and fifteen pounds. If there should be the same deficiency next winter,

I shall be obliged to you, if without waiting to hear further from me, you will be so good as to sell my chambers.

I had a letter yesterday from a friend of my brother's at Be'net. I do not find that there is any immediate occasion for my going over to Cambridge, especially as I have wrote to desire that my brother will come to Olney. He is not at present in a condition to undertake the journey; but Dr. Glynn approves of his coming, and will send him as soon as it shall be expedient. The account that I hear of him is, that he has a great shortness of breath, attended with a troublesome cough, and that within this week his legs are very much swelled; but when his friend wrote he had had a good night, was pretty cheerful, and, upon the whole, not worse than when he wrote before.

I should be glad if my Uncle Ashley would be so good as to get an answer from Colonel Cowper with respect to the books, that if he does not choose to be the purchaser they may be sold to another, for I imagine time and cobwebs will not much increase their value.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

A few days later Cowper was again summoned to Cambridge. On Feb. 26th he wrote as follows to Mrs. Unwin :—

TO MRS. UNWIN, OLNEY, BUCKS

*Cambridge, 26th Feb. 1770.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The blank which Mr. Newton left at the bottom of his letter came a blank to me. And why so? Do you imagine that a line from

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you, though it were but a line, would not be welcome to me, especially in my present distressful circumstances ? This is my fourth letter to you since I came hither, and I have received but one from you ; perhaps to-morrow's post will bring me another, at least I shall be much disappointed if it does not, and shall begin to suspect that I have done something wrong ; though wherever I fail, I am very sure I never intentionally fail in any point where your peace and happiness are concerned. My poor brother continues much as he was, only worse in this respect, that the longer the imposthume remains unbroken, the greater danger there is of a confirmed dropsy. Within these two days his hands have begun to swell ; and having lately been obliged to keep his bed, he is grown much weaker. If at any time, I find liberty to speak to him, it is when his sufferings are greatest ; for when his pains are abated, he is cheerful in his spirits, and exactly the man he always was. I have found at last, however, that he is not destitute of notions about the Truth. He told me yesterday that he had read Mr. Newton's sermons, and that the thought upon which they were built was not new, but borrowed from Witsius. He has read Witsius, and I suppose understands him as far as he is intelligible without spiritual light, for he observed that those doctrines had been mixed and interwoven with others till at last they had been quite lost. I told him they were the Truth, and that there was no other Gospel ; that we were not to look for novelty in such things ; and that neither Witsius nor Mr. Newton were the inventors of them, but they were evidently to be seen in St. Paul's Epistles. I found I had a fair opportunity to make

a confession of my faith, which I did as well as I was able, illustrating it by my own experience. At present, however, I see no effect of all that I have said. I have a trembling hope, however, that when the Lord has made it sufficiently evident that the excellency of the power is His own, He will take the matter into His own hand, and plead the cause of Gospel grace Himself. He alone can do it effectually, and I desire that He may have all the glory.

In the meanwhile I am tossed upon the waves of hope and fear, I see my brother asleep upon the very brink of ruin, and the only hand that can pluck him thence is not yet stretched out for his deliverance. Every day brings him sensibly nearer to the great decision, my thoughts are interested in his condition all day long, and at night I pray for him in my dreams. I go to sleep in a storm, imagining that I hear his cries and wake in terror, lest he should be just departing. The enemy, I doubt not, has a share in this, and [whispers] in the ears of my fancy in order to make my situation more distress[ful]. Sometimes I see the Lord and can pour out my heart before Him. I [woke] yesterday morning with these words, which are plainly an imitation of [George Herbe]rt, some of whose poems I have been reading to my brother—

‘ But what my lovely one and meek  
Tho’ maimed, who livst, with bruises dying.’

I thought of them at dinner, and made a comfortable meal upon them, while the Lord was pleased to spread my table in the wilderness. He knows I am maimed and bruised, but still He maintains my life,

| and frequently makes the bones He has broken to  
rejoice.

By a letter from Colonel Cowper, I understand that Worral values my books at no more than £20, 10s. Od. Hill has by this time received the money ; if you choose it, I will order it down to you directly.

Let nothing I have said distress you ; your peace is as dear to me as my own, and I cannot grieve you without suffering myself. I will now take my revenge by leaving a blank too, and then I shall be satisfied.—Yours ever in the best bonds,

W.M. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER

March 5, 1770.

My brother continues much as he was. His case is a very dangerous one—an imposthume of the liver, attended by an asthma and dropsy. The physician has little hope of his recovery, I believe I might say none at all, only, being a friend, he does not formally give him over by ceasing to visit him, lest it should sink his spirits. For my own part, I have no expectation of his recovery, except by a signal interposition of Providence in answer to prayer. His case is clearly beyond the reach of medicine ; but I have seen many a sickness healed, where the danger has been equally threatening, by the only Physician of value. I doubt not He will have an interest in your prayers, as He has in the prayers of many. May the Lord incline His ear and give an answer of peace. I know it is good to be afflicted. I trust that you have found it so, and that under the teaching of God's own Spirit we

shall both be purified. It is the desire of my soul to seek a better country, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of His people; and where, looking back upon the ways by which He has led us, we shall be filled with everlasting wonder, love, and praise.

I must add no more.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO MRS. MADAN, STAFFORD ROW, WESTMINSTER

*Olney, March 24, 1770.*

DEAR AUNT,—You may possibly by this time have heard of the death of my dear brother. I should not have left you to learn it from any but myself, had I had either spirits or opportunity to write sooner. He died on Tuesday last, the 20th. It was not judged proper that I should attend the funeral; I therefore took leave of the melancholy scene as soon as possible, and returned to Olney on Thursday. He has left me to sing of mercy and judgment. Greater sufferings than he underwent are seldom seen; greater mercy than he received, I believe, never. His views of Gospel grace were as clear, and his sense of his interest in Christ as strong, as if he had been exercised in the Christian walk and warfare many years. This is my consolation, and strong consolation I find it, that he is gone to his Father and my Father, to his God and my God.

He is to be buried at his living, about seven miles from Cambridge, by his own desire, this day; the master and fellows attend the funeral.

I shall be obliged to you, my dear aunt, if the next time you write to dear Mrs. Cowper at York,

you will be so good as to inform her of this event.  
—I am, my dear aunt, yours affectionately in the  
Lord,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. W. UNWIN

*March 31, 1770.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad that the Lord made you a fellow-labourer with us in praying my dear brother out of darkness into light. It was a blessed work; and when it shall be your turn to die in the Lord, and to rest from all your labours, that work shall follow you. I once entertained hopes of his recovery: from the moment when it pleased God to give him light in his soul, there was for four days such a visible amendment in his body as surprised us all. Dr. Glynn himself was puzzled, and began to think that all his threatening conjectures would fail of their accomplishment. I am well satisfied that it was thus ordered, not for his own sake, but for the sake of us who had been so deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, that he might be able to give such evident proof of the work of God upon his soul as should leave no doubt behind it. As to his friends at Cambridge, they knew nothing of the matter. He never spoke of these things but to myself, nor to me when others were within hearing, except that he sometimes would speak in the presence of the nurse. He knew well to make the distinction between those who could understand him and those who could not; and that he was not in circumstances to maintain such a controversy as a declaration of his new views and sentiments would have exposed him to. Just after his death I spoke of this change to a dear friend of his, a fellow of

the college, who had attended him through all his sickness with assiduity and tenderness. But he did not understand me.

I now proceed to mention such particulars as I can recollect, and which I had not an opportunity to insert in my letters to Olney; for I left Cambridge suddenly, and sooner than I expected. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the difficulties he should have to encounter, if it should please God to raise him again. He saw the necessity of being faithful, and the opposition he should expose himself to by being so. Under the weight of these thoughts he one day broke out in the following prayer, when only myself was with him: ‘O Lord, Thou art light; and in Thee is no darkness at all. Thou art the Fountain of all wisdom, and it is essential to Thee to be good and gracious. I am a child, O Lord, teach me how I should conduct myself! Give me the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove! Bless the souls Thou hast committed to the care of Thy helpless miserable creature, who has no wisdom or knowledge of his own, and make me faithful to them for Thy mercy’s sake!’ Another time he said: ‘How wonderful it is that God should look upon man; and how much more wonderful that He should look upon such a worm as I am! Yet He does look upon me, and takes the exactest notice of all my sufferings. He is present, and I see Him (I mean by faith); and He stretches out His arms towards me—and he then stretched out his own—‘and He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!”’ He smiled and wept when he spoke these words.

Again he said to the nurse who sat by his bedside, while I was writing at the other end of the room : ‘Nurse ! I will tell you my history. Oh, what an unprofitable worthless creature I have been ! When I was a child, they put a hornbook into my hand and taught me the alphabet. In a few years they sent me to learn Latin, and because I was the son of a gentleman I learned Greek too. Then I came to this place, and here I learned more Latin and more Greek. And thus I have spent my three-and-thirty years.’ Then addressing himself to me, he said : ‘ Brother, I was going to say, in such a year I was born, but I correct myself. I would rather say, in such a year I came into the world. *You* know when I was born.’

When he expressed himself upon these subjects, there was a weight and a dignity in his manner such as I never saw before. He spoke with the greatest deliberation, making a pause at the end of every sentence ; and there was something in his air and in the tone of his voice inexpressibly solemn, unlike himself, unlike what I had ever seen in another.

This hath God wrought. I have praised my brother for his marvellous tact, and have felt a joy of heart upon the subject of his death such as I never felt but in my own conversion. He is now before the throne ; and yet a little while, and we shall meet never more to be divided.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love to yourself and Mrs. and Miss Unwin. The objections to our visiting you this year remain as they were. We shall have occasion for all our money and all our management.—Yours, my very dear friend, with my affectionate respects to yourself and yours,

W. C.

*Postscript.*—A day or two before his death he grew so weak, and was so very ill, that he required continual attendance, so that he had neither strength nor opportunity to say much to me. Only the day before, he said he had had a sleepless, but a composed and quiet night. I asked him if he had been able to collect his thoughts. He replied: ‘All night long I have endeavoured to think upon God and to continue in prayer. I had great peace and comfort; and what comfort I had came in that way.’ When I saw him the next morning at seven o’clock, he was dying, fast asleep, and exempted, in all appearance, from the sense of those pangs which accompany dissolution. I shall be glad to hear from you, my dear friend, when you can find time to write and are so inclined. The death of my beloved brother teems with many useful lessons. May God seal the instruction upon our hearts!

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, April 21, 1770.*

DEAR JOE,—You will oblige me by inquiring at the Bank, the next time your business calls you that way, what stock my brother left, and by what means it is to be transferred to me, when the next dividend is payable, and whether it will be convenient for you to receive it for me by letter of attorney. You may be sure it will give me great pleasure to find myself now enabled to purchase such an annuity as may enable me to subsist comfortably without being any longer chargeable to my friends. You are the best judge of these matters, and I shall be glad of your advice. I know not what is in the Bank; but

should hope there may be as much, as with the sale of my brother's effects at Cambridge, and my own chambers, may enable me to compass this very desirable point. I mention this in confidence.—Yours, dear Joe, with my affectionate remembrances to Mrs. Hill and your sister,

W.M. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*May 8, 1770.*

DEAR JOE,—Your letter did not reach me till the last post, when I had not time to answer it. I left Cambridge immediately after my brother's death.

I am obliged to you for the particular account you have sent me. He to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns hath otherwise appointed, and let His will be done. He gives me much which He withholds from others; and if He was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, His will be done.

It pleased God to cut short my brother's connections and expectations here, yet not without giving him lively and glorious views of a better happiness than any he could propose to himself in such a world as this. Notwithstanding his great learning (for he was one of the chief men in the university in that respect), he was candid and sincere in his inquiries after truth. Though he could not come into my sentiments when I first acquainted him with them, nor in the many conversations which I afterward had with him upon the subject could he be brought to acquiesce in them as

scriptural and true; yet I had no sooner left St. Albans than he began to study with the deepest attention those points in which we differed, and to furnish himself with the best writers upon them. His mind was kept open to conviction for five years, during all which time he laboured in this pursuit with unwearyed diligence, as leisure and opportunity were afforded. Amongst his dying words were these: ‘Brother, I thought you wrong, yet wanted to believe as you did. I found myself not able to believe, yet always thought I should be one day brought to do so.’ From the study of books, he was brought upon his deathbed to the study of himself, and there learnt to renounce his righteousness, and his own most amiable character, and to submit himself to the righteousness which is of God by faith. With these views he was desirous of death. Satisfied of his interest in the blessing purchased by the blood of Christ, he prayed for death with earnestness, felt the approaches of it with joy, and died in peace.—Yours, my dear friend,      W. C.

## TO MRS. COWPER

*Olney, June 7, 1770.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I am obliged to you for sometimes thinking of an unseen friend, and bestowing a letter upon me. It gives me pleasure to hear from you, especially to find that our gracious Lord enables you to weather out the storms you meet with, and to cast anchor within the veil.

You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord’s late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow, that I

had lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subject became the same; but much more cause of joy, that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that He had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of His children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank Him, because He might have done all that He was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that He enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the hearts of many in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

He told me that from the time he was first ordained he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed or allowed to be there. From the time when I first visited him after my release from St. Albans, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in the school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingenuously sought the truth but they found it. A spirit of earnest inquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, seek ye My face in vain. Accordingly, about ten days before his death it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, and to reveal in his

heart the knowledge of the Saviour, and to give him firm and unshaken peace in the belief of His ability and willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller,<sup>1</sup> he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and had there been such a one, must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman<sup>2</sup> foretold him when he should die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter; but whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that He would intrust His secret counsels to a vagrant, who did not mean I suppose to be understood to have received her intelligence from the Fountain of light, but thought herself sufficiently honoured by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the Prince of darkness.

Mrs. Unwin is much obliged to you for your kind inquiry after her. She is well, I thank God, as usual, and sends her respects to you. Her son is in the ministry, and has the living of Stock, in Essex. We were last week alarmed with an account of his being dangerously ill; Mrs. Unwin went to see him, and in a few days left him out of danger.

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> When John Cowper was at Felsted School, Essex, a travelling gipsy tinker, in an old soldier's red coat, made a number of predictions concerning him, which one after another were verified. John Cowper made a trouble of the matter

<sup>2</sup> Error. It was a man.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Sept. 25, 1770.*

DEAR JOE,—I have not done conversing with terrestrial objects, though I should be happy were I able to hold more continual converse with a Friend above the skies. He has my heart, but He allows a corner in it for all who show me kindness, and therefore one for you. The storm of sixty-three made a wreck of the friendships I had contracted in the course of many years, yours excepted, which has survived the tempest.

I thank you for your repeated invitation. Singular thanks are due to you for so singular an instance of your regard. I could not leave Olney, unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others.

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 1, 1771.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—You will receive two parcels of venison—a haunch and a shoulder. The first was intended for you, the other comes to you by mistake. Some hours after the basket was sent to the waggon, we discovered that the shoulder had been packed up instead of the haunch. All imaginable endeavours were made to recover it, but without success; the waggon could not be unloaded again, and it was impossible otherwise to get at it. You may therefore thank a blundering servant for a venison pasty, which if she had minded her business better would have been eaten at Olney.—Yours, my dear friend,

WM. COWPER.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Aug. 27, 1771.*

DEAR JOE,—I take a friend's share in all your concerns, so far as they come to my knowledge, and consequently did not receive the news of your marriage with indifference. I wish you and your bride all the happiness that belongs to the state; and the still greater felicity of that state which marriage is only a type of. All those connections shall be dissolved; but there is an indissoluble bond between Christ and His Church, the subject of derision to an unthinking world, but the glory and happiness of all His people.

I join with your mother and sisters in their joy upon the present occasion, and beg my affectionate respects to them and to Mrs. Hill unknown.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, Jan. 30, 1772.*

DEAR JOE,—An article in the last General Evening, compared with an advertisement in the same paper, has affected me with the deepest concern upon my Uncle Ashley's account. In the present uncertainty of my mind I am left to imagine the worst. It would have been kind in some of my many relations if they had not left me to learn such melancholy intelligence from the public prints. I shall be obliged to you for such particulars as you can favour me with. They will at least serve to relieve me from the variety of restless conjectures which cannot but employ my mind on such an occasion.—Yours, my dear friend,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Feb. 4, 1772.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am much indebted to you for your goodness in relieving me by the first opportunity from the fears I had upon my Uncle's account. The newspaper led me into the mistake, when the person was described as the Clerk of the House of Lords, without the addition of his proper distinction. But I feel much for Mrs. Cowper, and the poor young man, and love him better than he is aware of, though I have not seen him many years, and he was but a child when I saw him last. So sudden a stroke must fall very heavy upon her; but I know her principles to be such as will afford her support under the heaviest that can befall her. The dress, the circumstance of his having no baggage, and the time, all seem to concur in giving us a good hope that he was the person seen at Dover. You will make me happy by sending me the first intelligence you hear of him, for I could hardly be more interested in any case, not immediately my own, than I am in this. I am, with my best respects to Mrs. Hill, and thanks for her kindness.—Yours ever,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*April 7, 1772.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am very much obliged to you that in the hurry of so much business, you could yet find time to fulfil your promise, and send me the earliest intelligence of my poor cousin. But as Mrs. Cowper is so kind as to write to me herself upon the occasion, I will discharge you from any further trouble about it. We have seen the dark

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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side of the dispensation, and I yet hope it has a bright one. This I know, that if he reap the same fruit of his sorrows as thousands have found springing up from the deepest afflictions, he will rejoice in the remembrance of them, as I do, and shall do, while I live, in the recollection of mine.—Yours, my dear friend, with my respects to Mrs. Hill and all your family,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Olney, June 27, 1772.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I only write to return you thanks for your kind offer—*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ*. But I will endeavour to go on without troubling you. Excuse an expression that dishonours your friendship; I should rather say, it would be a trouble to myself, and I know you will be generous enough to give me credit for the assertion. I had rather want many things, any thing, indeed, that this world could afford me, than abuse the affection of a friend. I suppose you are sometimes troubled upon my account. But you need not. I have no doubt it will be seen, when my days are closed, that I served a Master who would not suffer me to want any thing that was good for me. He said to Jacob, ‘I will surely do thee good’; and this He said, not for his sake only, but for ours also, if we trust in Him. This thought relieves me from the greatest part of the distress I should else suffer in my present circumstances, and enables me to sit down peacefully upon the wreck of my fortune.—Yours ever, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 2, 1772.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—My obligations to you sit easy upon me, because I am sure you confer them in the spirit of a friend. 'Tis pleasant to some minds to confer obligations, and it is not unpleasant to others to be properly sensible of them. I hope I have this pleasure,—and can with a true sense of your kindness subscribe myself, yours,      W.C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 5, 1772.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You will certainly find the mistake on your side. When on the occasion of my brother's death you was so good as to make enquiry for me at the Bank, you found seven hundred pounds there. Three hundred and fifty pounds were sold, as you say, to pay the College three hundred pounds, consequently three hundred and fifty remain. As you had forgot the principal, doubtless you have not received the interest for the last two years, I would have it reserved, if you please, for payment of my tailor's bill. You say you expect farther remittances on my account, out of these you will be so good as to pay yourself. I thank you for the money you sent me by the post, but twenty pounds will not serve my present expenses. This is the season of the year when my wants are always most importunate. I shall be glad therefore if you will sell the odd fifty pounds, and remit me the money by the first opportunity.

Believe me, my dear friend, truly sensible of your

invitation, though I do not accept it. My peace of mind is of so delicate a constitution, that the air of London will not agree with it. You have my prayers, the only return I can make you, for your many acts of still-continued friendship.

If you should smile, or even laugh at my conclusion, and I were near enough to see it, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed at such a recompence myself. But glory be to the name of Jesus, those days are past, and I trust never to return!—I am yours, and Mrs. Hill's, with much sincerity,

Wm. Cowper.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 14, 1772.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I received last night the two notes for thirty pounds and ten pounds. I will not trouble you at present with my tailor's bill. I shall have occasion to employ him in the spring, by which time it is possible there may be enough in my bank to answer his demand, and you may expect to see him about March or April with a draft in his hand. I do not design to break into the stock, unless it should be unavoidably necessary. But you know well that I have been a considerable loser in point of income by my brother's death, and that the price of every thing is continually advancing, so that it is become much more difficult to bring the year about now than when I first left St. Albans. I am guilty of no extravagance, or inattention to what is called the main chance, nor would be on any account. My situation in life is comfortable; my friends would wish it to be so; nor is there a place

in the kingdom where I should enjoy so many advantages as here. And yet, as I say, there may possibly arise a necessity of having recourse to the funds, though nothing less than necessity shall compel us to do it. In that case I should hope not to be censured, for the reasons above mentioned: and in the meantime shall do my best to prevent the necessity of such a measure.—Believe me, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

Wm. COWPER.

### THE THIRD DERANGEMENT

#### THE FATAL DREAM

THE death of his brother had been a severe blow to Cowper, and a state of considerable dejection followed. Cowper, however, still clung to the belief that God was trying him only for his good.

On the 24th of January 1778 he had a terrible seizure. Newton and his wife were roused from their beds at four in the morning, and stayed with him, one or the other, till eight in the evening, ‘when the threatening appearance went entirely off.’ For more than a month Cowper remained in a low state, and then one night towards the end of February he had a dreadful dream, in which he heard a ‘word’ which caused him to cross the line that divided a life of hope from a life of despair. The ‘word,’ no doubt, was, ‘*Actum est de te, periisti*’ —‘It is all over with thee, thou hast perished.’ Henceforth Cowper was a doomed man. God had forsaken him for ever. And the fearful delusion never left him except for very brief intervals. The

derangement lasted a year and five months, during most of which time he was at the Vicarage, lovingly watched over by Newton. In May 1774 he began to amend, and on the 23rd was able to return to Orchard Side. In the meantime a change had taken place in Mrs. Unwin's household, Susanna Unwin having been married on the 5th of May to the Rev. Matthew Powley, a prominent Evangelical minister. For attending prayer-meetings Mr. Powley and several other young men at Oxford had been subjected to persecution. In 1761 the authorities had threatened to expel him for these practices, and later (1768) six students who did likewise, one of whom was Mr. Thomas Jones, afterwards curate of Clifton Reynes, and friend of Cowper (see the *Hop-o'-my-Thumb* letter), actually were expelled. In 1767 Mr. Powley became curate of Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, whither he took his bride; in 1777 he was appointed vicar of Dewsbury.

The following are the principal passages in Cowper's letters relating to his terrible derangement and the fatal dream :—

1781, Aug. 21.—My thoughts are clad in a sober livery. . .

The tallest fellow and the loudest amongst them all is he who is continually crying, with a loud voice, *Actum est de te, periisti!*

1784, Jan. 13.—Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. . . . The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoken no other language.

1785, Oct. 16.—I had a dream twelve years ago, before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes.

1786, *April 3.*—My snuff-box from Anonymous on the 24th of January, on which day, twelve years ago, I plunged into a melancholy that made me almost an infant.

1786, *May 20.*—Adam's approach to the tree of life, after he had sinned, was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword than mine to its great antitype has been now almost these thirteen years.

1798.—*Oct. 13.*—‘In one day, in one minute, I should rather have said,’ nature ‘became a universal blank to me.’

The following letter of Mrs. Unwin's is here inserted both because so very few of her letters have been preserved and on account of the interesting references to Cowper:—

TO MRS. NEWTON, AT MR. PRINDER'S, NORTHAMPTON

*Oct. 7, 1773.*

I HOPE, my dear madam, this will meet you well, and safely returned thus far on your journey. Though it will be a sincere pleasure to me to see you and dear Mr. Newton again, yet I beg you will not put yourselves to the least inconvenience or hurry to reach home, till the most fit and agreeable time. The Lord is very gracious to us; for though the cloud of affliction still hangs heavy on Mr. Cowper, yet he is quite calm and persuadable in every respect. He has been for these few days past more open and communicative than heretofore. It is amazing how subtilly the cruel adversary has worked upon him, and wonderful to see how the Lord has frustrated his wicked machinations; for though He has not seen good to prevent the most violent temptations and distressing delusions, yet He has prevented the mischievous effects the enemy

designed by them: a most marvellous story will this dear child of God have to relate, when, by His Almighty power, he is set at liberty. As nothing short of Omnipotence could have supported him through this sharp affliction, so nothing less can set him free from it. I allow that means are, in general, not only lawful but also expedient; but in the present case, we must, I am convinced, advert to our first sentiment, that this is a peculiar and exempt one, and that the Lord Jehovah will be alone exalted when the day of deliverance comes.

I must beg the favour of you to buy for me two pounds of chocolate, half a pound or ten ounces of white sixpenny worsted, half a dozen lemons, and two sets of knitting-needles, six in a set, one the finest that can be got, of iron and steel, the other a size coarser. Sally nor Judy know of my writing, else I am sure they would desire me to insert their

#### ERRATUM

Vol. i. p. 134, l. 14, 'Mr. Prender's.' Thus in Southey, but I have since discovered that it should be 'Mr. Trender's.'

~~and much no more recently,~~  
making a gap of two years. He then writes to Joseph Hill:—

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, May 18, 1776.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—You have my thanks for the very fine mackerel you sent, and for your kind invitation

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M. UNWIN.

Cowper, as we have seen, recovered in May 1774. We find no more letters, however, till May 1776, making a gap of two years. He then writes to Joseph Hill:—

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, May 18, 1776.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—You have my thanks for the very fine mackerel you sent, and for your kind invitation

to Wargrave.<sup>1</sup> I am a little mortified to find that I had not got the start of your gardener as much as I hoped to have done; but let him be upon his guard, or I shall be too nimble for him another year.

I want money, not to lend, nor to give, but for my own personal and particular use; and want it so much, that I can't go on without it. You will oblige me if you will give yourself the trouble to sell fifty pounds and remit me the produce immediately. I beg you will do this without making any sad reflections upon it; for assure yourself, neither you nor I shall ever have any reason to repent the doing it.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

May 26, 1776.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—More thanks for more mackerel, and many more for the fifty pounds, which I received yesterday. It gave me the greater pleasure, as it afforded a convincing proof that in your former refusal you was guided by nothing but an attention to my interest.

The winter having swallowed up the spring this year has thrown me so backward in some of my nicer productions, that I shall not be able to send you any melons till late in the season; but if you raise none yourself, they shall wait upon you as soon as they are ripe.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Hill's country house at Wargrave, seven miles north-east of Reading.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 6, 1776.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As you have an extensive acquaintance, you may possibly be able to serve me in a design I have lately formed, of taking two, three, or four boys under my tuition, to instruct them in the Greek and Latin languages. I should pursue, with some few exceptions, the Westminster method of instruction, being that which I am best acquainted with myself, and the best upon the whole that I have had an opportunity of observing. They would lodge and board under our roof, and be in all respects accommodated and attended in a manner that would well warrant the demand of a hundred guineas per annum.

You have often wished me an employment, and I know none but this for which I am qualified. If I can engage in it, it will probably be serviceable to me in more respects than one; but as it will afford me some sort of an establishment, at least for a time, it cannot but be desirable to one in my circumstances. If you are acquainted therefore with any person who has a son or sons between eight and ten years of age, for whom he would wish to find a tutor who will not make a property of them, nor neglect any means in his power to inform them thoroughly in what he undertakes to teach, you will oblige me by recommending me. Doubtless there are many such; and it is not an easy matter to find a family where the two grand points of education, literature and sobriety, would be more closely attended to than in This.

We return you many thanks for the fine turbot you was so kind as to send.—Believe me yours, etc.,  
Wm. Cowper.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Aug. 1, 1776.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The coldness of the past season would be forgotten in the heat of the present if the effects of it were not still visible in the garden. My melons, which ought to have been eaten or at least eatable by this time, are not yet ripe; and as you are taking your repose at Wargrave, you will agree with me, I imagine, that it would hardly be worth while to trundle them so far. Else, as I flatter myself they will be better flavoured than such as are raised for sale, which are generally flashy, and indebted to the watering pot for their size, I should have been glad to have sent you half my crop.

If it were to rain pupils, perhaps I might catch a tub full; but till it does, the fruitlessness of my inquiries makes me think I must keep my Greek and Latin to myself.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. Cowper.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Nov. 12, 1776.*

DEAR FRIEND,—The very agreeable contents of your last came safe to hand in the shape of two notes for thirty pounds. I am to thank you likewise for a barrel of very good oysters, received about a fortnight ago. One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion

to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them—butts, plaice, flounder, or any other. If herrings are yet to be had, as they cannot be bought at Olney till they are good for nothing, they will be welcome too. We have seen none this year, except a parcel that Mrs. Unwin sent for, and the fishmonger sent stale ones, a trick they are apt to play upon their customers at a distance.

Having suffered so much from nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.—Believe me yours,      Wm. COWPER.

The Wellingborough Diligence passes our door every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and inns at the Cross Keys, St. John's Street, Smithfield.

As to the frequency, which you leave to my choice too, you have no need to exceed the number of your former remittances.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 10, 1776.*

DEAR JOE.—Received two notes for twenty-five pounds.

This day fortnight came two dozen herrings, remarkably fine. If you ordered any other fish to follow them, they swam another way.

Dr. Madan's<sup>1</sup> preferment was in the paper, but I overlooked it, so I know neither the name, nor the value of it. But being a sinecure, and as we say, a very valuable one, it has every requisite to raise the spirits.—Yours affectionately, Wm. Cowper.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 5, 1777.*

DEAR JOSEPH,—I am much obliged to you for a tub of very fine spiced salmon which arrived yesterday; it cost us some debate, and a wager into the bargain, one asserting it to be sturgeon, and the other what it proved to be. But the lady was in the right, as she should be upon all such occasions.

My respects wait upon your family. The cold is excessive; but I have a little greenhouse, which by the help of a little fire is as blooming and as green as May.—Yours affectionately, Wm. Cowper.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*March 30, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Though you are by this time in Berkshire at least, if not in Warwickshire, I thought it would be best to acknowledge the receipt of the draft upon Child for twenty pounds, by the return of the post.

I sent you two brace of cucumbers by the Diligence on Friday, that is to say, critically at the time when they were sure to miss you: if yours are as

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Spencer Madan, Bishop of Peterborough, and brother of the Rev. Martin Madan.

forward, you have outstripped all our nobility and squires in this country. Neither the Duke of Bedford nor Lord Sussex have cut yet. But you must not be angry with your gardener, for we have more sunshine in two months at some seasons than we have had this half-year.—Yours ever,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

*April—I fancy the 20th, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Thanks for a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone<sup>1</sup>; a gentleman who relates his travels so agreeably, that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion. I have been reading Gray's works, and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet I think equally poignant with the Dean's.—I am, yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

*May 25, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think,

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Brydone, born 1741, travelled much on the continent, and published a book on Sicily and Malta in 1773. Died 1818.

are worth little, as such, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgment. As to Mr. West's Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but have nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it; but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 18, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You need not give yourself any further trouble to procure me the South Sea Voyages. Lord Dartmouth,<sup>1</sup> who was here about a month since, and was so kind as to pay me two visits, has furnished me with both Cook's and Forster's.<sup>2</sup> 'Tis well for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of that kind in peace.

If, when you are most at leisure, you can find out

<sup>1</sup> See letter of 9th October '84

<sup>2</sup> The two Forsters, father and son, accompanied Captain Cook on his second voyage. The son published an account of the expedition in 1777.

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TO JOSEPH HILL

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Baker<sup>1</sup> upon the Microscope, or Vincent Bourne's Latin Poems, the last edition, and send them, I shall be obliged to you. Either, or both, if they can be easily found.—I am, yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL.

*Oct. 23, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If a melon in the spring is a rarity, a melon in the beginning of winter perhaps may be so too, especially after so sharp a frost as we have lately had, and still more if it should happen to be a frost when you eat it. This and the fellow to it grew upon one joint. The vine was never watered since it was a seed. We ate part of one of them to-day, and thought it good; the other, which is better ripened, we supposed might be even worthy of a place at your table, and have sent it accordingly.

I am obliged to you for three parcels of herrings. The melon is a crimson Cantaloupe.—Believe me, affectionately yours,

Wm. COWPER.

The basket contains, besides, Bourne's poems and Baker on the Microscope with thanks.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 28, 1777.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As Lord Dartmouth was so kind as to furnish me with Captain Cook's last tour<sup>2</sup> round the globe, and with Mr. Forster's account of the same voyage, I am unwilling to be farther

<sup>1</sup> Henry Baker, the naturalist, son-in-law of Daniel Defoe. Died November 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Cook's second voyage. The account of his third voyage (1776-1779) did not appear till 1784. See Cowper's Letters of 27th May '82, 16th August '84, 9th October '84.

troublesome to him; and as I can venture to take a little liberty with you, which I could not handsomely take with his lordship, I will beg the favour of you, when you can do it conveniently, to send me either Commodore Byron's voyage round the world,<sup>1</sup> or Captain Cook's first voyage,<sup>2</sup> or both, if they are both to be had, which, as the public curiosity is pretty well satisfied by this time, may possibly be the case. There was an account published by some of the people of the long boat, who parted from Captain Cook upon the coast of Patagonia. Their separation is all that is mentioned in Mr. Byron's first publication. If this can be procured, I shall be glad of it. And pray do not scruple to tell me if I am too troublesome in pestering you with these commissions, for I had rather never see the books than extort from you one single Pish.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Dec. 11, 1777.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If I begin with thank you, I must end with it too, unless I manage it thus. I am obliged to you, and thank you for the books, for the fish, for the thirty pounds, which I hope I shall be able to negotiate here; and Mrs. Hill, for the seeds she is so kind as to send me, is entitled to the same return. Besides which, when I return the books, I will enclose with them some seed of the plant called the Broallia, a new flower in this country. A few seeds were given me last year, which have produced a quantity. Gordon, I am

<sup>1</sup> A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's Ship the *Resolution*.  
Commodore Byron was the grandfather of the poet.

<sup>2</sup> Originally appeared in Hawkesworth's *Voyages*.

told, sells it two guineas an ounce. We account it the most elegant flower we have seen; and when Lord Dartmouth was here, he did it the honour to think with us. I will send with it directions for the management of it.—I am, with compliments to Mrs. Hill, yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 1, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your last packet was doubly welcome, and Mrs. Hill's kindness gives me peculiar pleasure, not as coming from a stranger to me, for I do not account her so, though I never saw her, but as coming from one so nearly connected with yourself. I shall take care to acknowledge the receipt of her obliging letter when I return the books. Assure yourself, in the meantime, that I read as if the librarian was at my elbow, continually jogging it, and growling out, Make haste. But as I read aloud, I shall not have finished before the end of the week, and will return them by the diligence next Monday.

I shall be glad if you will let me know whether I am to understand by the sorrow you express that any part of my former supplies is actually cut off, or whether they are only more tardy in coming in than usual. It is useful even to the rich to know, as nearly as may be, the exact amount of their income; but how much more so to a man of my small dimensions. If the former should be the case, I shall have less reason to be surprised than I have to wonder at the continuance of them so long. Favours are favours indeed, when laid out upon so barren a soil, where the expense of sowing is never

accompanied by the smallest hope of return. What pain there is in gratitude, I have often felt; but the pleasure of requiting an obligation has always been out of my reach.—Affectionately yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*April 11, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Poor Sir Thomas!<sup>1</sup> I knew that I had a place in his affections, and from his own information, many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honour, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease.

I am reading the Abbé<sup>2</sup> with great satisfaction, and think him the most intelligent writer upon so extensive a subject I ever met with; in every respect superior to the Abbé in Scotland.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

*P.S.—Many thanks for the intended fish.*

*Sunday morning.*

Which is just come, and should have been here last night. I shall bumble my landlady at Newport.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*May 7, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have been in continual fear lest every post should bring a summons for the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Hesketh.

<sup>2</sup> Abbé Raynal (1711-1796). His *Histoire Philosophique des Établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes* appeared in 1770.

Abbé Raynal ; and am glad that I have finished him before my fears were realised. I have kept him long, but not through neglect or idleness. I read the five volumes to Mrs. Unwin ; and my voice will seldom serve me with more than an hour's reading at a time. I am indebted to him for much information upon subjects, which, however interesting, are so remote from those with which country folks in general are conversant, that had not his works reached me at Olney, I should have been for ever ignorant of them.

I admire him as a philosopher, as a writer, as a man of extraordinary intelligence, and no less extraordinary abilities to digest it. He is a true patriot. But then the world is his country. The frauds and tricks of the cabinet and the counter seem to be equally objects of his aversion. And if he had not found that religion too had undergone a mixture of artifice in its turn, perhaps he would have been a Christian.—Yours affectionately,

W.M. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*June 18, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I truly rejoice that the Chancellor has made you such a present, that he has given such an additional lustre to it by his manner of conferring it, and that all this happened before you went to Wargrave, because it made your retirement there the more agreeable. This is just according to the character of the man. He will give grudgingly, in answer to solicitation, but delights in surprising those he esteems with his bounty. May you live to receive still further proofs that I

am not mistaken in my opinion of him.—Yours  
affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

TO REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 18, 1778.*

DEAR UNWIN,—I feel myself much obliged to you for your intimation, and have given the subject of it all my best attention, both before I received your letter and since. The result is, that I am persuaded it will be better not to write. I know the man and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such occasions; and, after fifteen years' interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language—pray remember the poor. This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique application. He has not forgotten me; and, if he had, there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me, and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would, perhaps, give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit, and if he means me such a favour I should disappoint him by asking it.

Thus he dealt with my friend Mr. Hill (to whom, by the way, I introduced him, and to all my family connections in town). He sent for him the week before last, and, without any solicitations, freely gave him one of his secretaryships. I know not the income; but as Mr. Hill is in good circumstances, and the gift was unasked, I dare say it is no trifle.

I repeat my thanks for your suggestion; you see

a part of my reasons for thus conducting myself; if we were together, I could give you more. Mrs. Unwin sends her best love to you and to all at Stock; my affectionate respects accompany it.—  
Yours affectionately,                           W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 18, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I hurry you into the midst of things at once, which if it be not much in the epistolary style, is acknowledged, however, to be very sublime. Mr. Morley, *videlicet* the grocer, is guilty of much neglect and carelessness, and has lately so much disappointed your mother, that she is at last obliged to leave him, and begs you will send her Mr. Rawlinson's address, that she may transfer her custom to him. She adds, moreover, that she was well aware of the unseasonableness of salmon at this time, and did not mean that you should order any to Olney till the spring.

We are indebted to you for your political intelligence, but have it not in our power to pay you in kind. Proceed, however, to give us such information as cannot be learned from the newspaper; and when anything arises at Olney, that is not in the threadbare style of daily occurrences, you shall hear of it in return. Nothing of this sort has happened lately, except that a lion was imported here at the fair,<sup>1</sup> seventy years of age, and was as tame as a goose. Your mother and I saw him embrace his keeper with his paws, and lick his face. Others saw him receive his head in his mouth, and restore it to

<sup>1</sup> Cherry Fair, held every 29th of June.

— him again unhurt;—a sight we chose not to be favoured with, but rather advised the honest man to discontinue the practice—a practice hardly reconcilable to prudence, unless he had a head to spare. The beast, however, was a very magnificent one, and much more royal in his appearance than those I have seen in the Tower.

The paper tells us that the Chancellor is frequently at the Register Office, having conceived a design to shorten the proceedings in his court. If he has indeed such a purpose in view, he is so industrious and so resolute, that he will never let it drop unaccomplished. Perhaps the practitioners will have no reason to regret it, as they may gain in such an event more by the multiplicity of suits than they do at present by the length of them.

Your mother joins me in affectionate respects—I should have said in love—to yourself, Mrs. Unwin, Miss Shuttleworth, and little John. If you will accept this for a letter, perhaps I may be able to furnish you with more such upon occasion.—Yours, with thanks for your last,

W.M. COWPER.



TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 3, 1778.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was last night agreeably surprised by the arrival of Mr. Dodsley.<sup>1</sup> His own merit is his sufficient recommendation; but his appearance, without having been expected or even thought of, made him still more welcome. You have done a kind thing in sending him, and I wish

<sup>1</sup> Some work by Robert Dodsley (1703-1764), publisher and author.

we could recompense it by a pine-apple for every volume.

I made Mr. Wrighte's<sup>1</sup> gardener a present of fifty sorts of stove plant seeds; in return, he has presented me with six fruiting pines, which I have put into a bark bed, where they thrive at present as well as I could wish. If they produce good fruit, you will stand some little chance to partake of them. But you must not expect giants, for being transplanted in December will certainly give them a check, and probably diminish their size. He has promised to supply me with still better plants in October, which is the proper season for moving them, and with a reinforcement every succeeding year. Mrs. Hill sent me the seeds, which perhaps could not have been purchased for less than three guineas. 'Tis thus we great gardeners establish a beneficial intercourse with each other, and furnish ourselves with valuable things that, therefore, cost us nothing.

How did you escape the storm? It did us no damage, except keeping us awake, and giving your mother the headache; and except—what can hardly be called a damage, lifting a long and heavy palisade from the top of our garden wall, and setting it so gently down upon two old hot-beds, that it was not at all broken or impaired.

Your mother is well at present, and sends her love, joining with me, at the same time, in affectionate remembrance to all the family.—Yours,

W.M. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wrighte of Gayhurst House.

PUBLICATION OF THE *OLNEY HYMNS.*

FEBRUARY 1779.

IN February 1779 the *Olney Hymns* were published. Cowper wrote 68 (which were marked with a 'C'), and Newton 280.

Of Cowper's the best are:—

- 'Oh, for a closer walk with God.'
- 'Hark, my soul! it is the Lord.'
- 'Jesus, where'er Thy people meet.'
- 'Sometimes a light surprises.'
- 'God moves in a mysterious way.'
- 'There is a fountain.'

Of Newton's the best are:—

- 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!'
- 'Begone unbelief.'
- 'Safely through another week.'
- 'Come, my soul, thy suit prepare.'

TO JOSEPH HILL

April 11, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When you favoured me with the last remittance of twenty pounds, you was so kind as to say I might draw for more, if I had occasion for it. The occasion is now come, and I shall be obliged to you for a further advance. I know I am in your debt, which sits the easier upon me because I am almost always so. Long habit and custom are able to familiarise to us things much more disagreeable than this. A debt of this kind

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I am, at present at least, able to discharge. But I  
owe you upon other accounts what I can never pay,  
except by continuing affectionately and truly yours,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

1<sup>st</sup> May 1779.

Not having the poem, and not having seen it these  
twenty years, I had much ado to recollect it, which  
has obliged me to tear off the first copy and write  
another—

*'Mercator vigiles oculos,' &c.<sup>1</sup>*

Four stanzas.

Your mother joins me in all you can wish to say  
to yourself and all your family, by no means for-  
getting great John and little Marianne.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 26, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I must beg your assistance  
in a design I have formed to cheat the glazier.  
Government has laid a tax upon glass, and he has  
trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large  
frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price  
for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you  
will inquire at a glass-manufacturer's how he sells  
his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and  
hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me  
this information, and at the same time the manu-  
facturer's address, I will execute the rest of the  
business myself, without giving you any farther  
trouble.

<sup>1</sup> Translation of Prior's exquisite ode, 'Chloe and Euphelia'—'The  
merchant to secure his treasure' (see Cowper's *Poems*, Globe Edition,  
p. 175).

I am obliged to you for the Poets;<sup>1</sup> and though I little thought that I was translating so much money out of your pocket into the bookseller's, when I turned Prior's poem into Latin, yet I must needs say that, if you think it worth while to purchase the English Classics at all, you cannot possess yourself of them upon better terms. I have looked into some of the volumes; but not having yet finished the Register, have merely looked into them. A few - things I have met with, which if they had been burned the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any; the English Muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash. Some of them again seem to me to have but a very disputable right to a place among the Classics; and I am quite at a loss, when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do.

Your mother sends her love and affectionate remembrance to all at Stock, from the tallest to the shortest there, in which she is accompanied by yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

July — 79.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James Martin, glazier, and tell

<sup>1</sup> Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, the first four volumes of which were published in this year, 1779.

him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford for half the money.

When I was at Margate, it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stone-work, and such I found it. By this time, I suppose, it is finished; and surely it is no small advantage that you have an opportunity of observing how nicely those great stones are put together, as often as you please, without either trouble or expense. But you think Margate more lively. So is a Cheshire cheese full of mites more lively than a sound one; but that very liveliness only proves its rottenness. I remember, too, that Margate, though full of company, was generally filled with such company as people who were nice in the choice of their company, were rather fearful of keeping company with. The hoy went to London every week, loaded with mackerel and herrings, and returned loaded with company. The cheapness of the conveyance made it equally commodious for Dead fish and Lively company. So, perhaps, your solitude at Ramsgate may turn out another advantage; at least I should think it one.

There was not, at that time, much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country, and the fine prospects of the sea, which are nowhere surpassed except in the Isle of Wight, or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember, engaged my curiosity, and I went to see it—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland, at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and

if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved by this fortunate incident. It is hardly possible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

We heartily wish that Mrs. Unwin may receive the utmost benefit of bathing. At the same time, we caution you against the use of it, however the heat of the weather may seem to recommend it. It is not safe for thin habits, hectically inclined.

I remember (the fourth and last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion) that Sam Cox, the counsel, walking by the seaside as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, ‘I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce a *sprat*.’

Our love attends your whole party.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

*P.S.*—You are desired to purchase three pounds of sixpenny white worsted, at a shop well recommended for that commodity. The Isle of Thanet is famous for it beyond any other place in the kingdom.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 17, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil

was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines :—

‘ —Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hæmi  
Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ !’

The worst of it is, that though the sunbeams strike as forcibly upon my harpstrings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon.

As you have ventured to make the experiment, your own experience will be your best guide in the article of bathing. An inference will hardly follow, though one should pull at it with all one's might, from Smollett's case to yours. He was corpulent, muscular, and strong; whereas, if you were either stolen or strayed, such a description of you in an advertisement would hardly direct an enquirer with sufficient accuracy and exactness. But if bathing does not make your head ache, or prevent your sleeping at night, I should imagine it could not hurt you.

I remember taking a walk upon the strand at Margate, where the cliff is high and perpendicular. At long intervals there are cart-ways, cut through the rock down to the beach, and there is no other way of access to it, or of return from it. I walked near a mile upon the water edge, without observing that the tide was rising fast upon me. When I *did* observe it, it was almost too late. I ran every step back again, and had much ado to save my distance. I mention this as a caution, lest you should happen at any time to be surprised as I was. It would be very unpleasant to be forced to cling, like a cat, to

the side of a precipice, and perhaps hardly possible to do it, for four hours without any respite.

It seems a trifle, but it is a real disadvantage to have no better name to pass by than the gentleman you mention. Whether we suppose him settled and promoted in the army, the church, or the law, how uncouth the sound—Captain Twopenny ! Bishop Twopenny ! Judge Twopenny ! The abilities of Lord Mansfield would hardly impart a dignity to such a name. Should he perform deeds worthy of poetical panegyric, how difficult would it be to ennable the sound of Twopenny !

Muse ! place him high upon the lists of Fame,  
The wonderous man, and Twopenny his name !

But to be serious, if the French should land in the Isle of Thanet, and Mr. Twopenny should fall into their hands, he will have a fair opportunity to frenchify his name, and may call himself Monsieur Deux Sous ; which, when he comes to be exchanged by Cartel, will easily resume an English form, and slide naturally into Two Shoes, in my mind a considerable improvement. We hope Mrs. Unwin receives benefit, though you have not said so, and that the rest of the party are all in good health. Our love attends yourself and them. Your mother proposes to write next week.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Aug. 17, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You will not expect line for line, or that I should measure your two last letters by a foot rule, and send you so many feet and so

many inches in return. I like very well to write ; but then I am fond of gardening too, and can find but little leisure for the pen, except when the weather forbids me to employ myself among my plants. Such is the case this morning ; the almost tropical heat of the day has driven me into the house, where, not knowing how to employ myself better, I am doing as you see.

You thought you had said too much about the Doctor ; and I feared I had said too much, or with too much freedom, about Mr. Twopenny ; though I stood quite clear of any design to undervalue the man, at the same time I made merry with his name. I used it as a plaything, imagining I should hardly find a cheaper.

Respecting the Doctor, you judge exactly as I had judged before I received your last, and so I had told your mother. It would be wrong to court him —*non est tanti* : you held him by the hand while he was sinking, and if upon his first beginning to emerge, he is capable of putting an intended slight upon you, your best course is to suffer it patiently, and to take care that it be the last.

As to your Kentish petitioners, they mean well, but the case is hopeless, and, consequently, the attempt (may I venture to say it ?) idle. When Henry the Eighth reformed the Church, he had twice as much power as George the Third ; both Houses of Parliament were on his side, and the clergy themselves, in convocation, being both ashamed and afraid to do otherwise, concurred heartily in the work ; but when the Parliament itself is to be reformed, itself must effect the reformation. And, do you think you have eloquence enough, in all

your county, to persuade them to relinquish what they have so earnestly laboured to obtain? Will pensioners, when they have read your harangue, resign their emoluments; placemen quit their offices; and candidates for preferment abandon all their blooming hopes, and say, 'These gentlemen are in the right; the nation will be ruined, we will retire, and be content'? I am afraid not; luxury makes men necessitous; necessity exposes them to corruption; corruption inclines them still more to profusion; and profusion, continually increasing, begets new necessities. These again engender corruption and profligacy of principle, and, as poor Robin says, so the world goes round. The king, in the meantime, is a sorrowful spectator of the scene, but a helpless one. No measure of government can proceed without a majority on its side, a majority cannot be had unless it be bought; then what answer can his majesty possibly return to the petition? If it is conceived in loyal and obedient terms, it is teasing him; if otherwise, insulting. So you see I differ from your neighbours upon the subject.

A longer arm and a stronger hand is requisite to this business. Man never was reformed by man; nor ever can be. Your petition, therefore, should be carried elsewhere, or it will be in vain. *Dixi.*

We rejoice that you are all safe at Stock again. Your mother is well, and sends her best love. You will be pleased to remember me affectionately to all under your roof, and to believe me, yours,

W.M. COWPER.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Sept. 21, 1779.*

AMICO MIO,—Be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants; but I cannot mend the kitchen windows till, by the help of that implement, I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber, I should be a complete glazier; and possibly the happy time may come when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, 'that he had found the Emilius who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea.' I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place.

I have eight pair of tame pigeons. When I first enter the garden in a morning, I find them perched upon the wall, waiting for their breakfast; for I feed them always upon the gravel-walk. If your

wish should be accomplished, and you should find yourself furnished with the wings of a dove, I shall undoubtedly find you amongst them. Only be so good, if that should be the case, to announce yourself by some means or other. For I imagine your crop will require something better than tares to fill it.

Your mother and I last week made a trip in a post-chaise to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens, I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hot-house in the most flourishing state, and the orange trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice.

Our love attends you all.—Yours,

W. C.

The snuff-shop is Arnold's in Newgate Street.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 2, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You begin to count the remaining days of the vacation, not with impatience, but through unwillingness to see the end of it. For the mind of man, at least of most men, is equally busy in anticipating the evil and the good. That

word anticipation puts me in remembrance of the pamphlet of that name, which, if you purchased, I should be glad to borrow. I have seen only an extract from it in the *Review*, which made me laugh heartily, and wish to peruse the whole.

The newspaper informs me of the arrival of the Jamaica fleet. I hope it imports some pine-apple plants for me. I have a good frame and a good bed prepared to receive them. I send you annexed a fable, in which the pine-apple<sup>1</sup> makes a figure, and shall be glad if you like the taste of it. Two pair of soles, with shrimps, which arrived last night, demand my acknowledgments. You have heard that when Arion performed upon the harp, the fish followed him. I really have no design to fiddle you out of more fish; but if you should esteem my verses worthy of such a price, though I shall never be so renowned as he was, I shall think myself equally indebted to the muse that helps me.

My affectionate respects attend Mrs. Hill. She has put Mr. Wrighte to the expense of building a new hothouse: the plants produced by the seeds she gave me having grown so large as to require an apartment by themselves.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

#### THE 'THRESH HIS OLD JACKET' LETTER

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Oct. 31, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I wrote my last letter merely

<sup>1</sup> Poem entitled 'The Pine-apples and the Bee.' Cowper wrote two poems on this subject—'The Pine-apples in triple Row,' the one sent to Hill, and 'A Bee, allured by the Perfume,' written a little earlier.

to inform you that I had nothing to say ; in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct, though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.

I have been well entertained with Johnson's biographies, for which I thank you : with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican ; and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvas. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him ; and it is well for Milton, that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged ; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing, and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon 'Lycidas,' and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule (what is indeed ridiculous enough) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if 'Lycidas' was the prototype and

pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced, by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever any thing so delightful as the music of the 'Paradise Lost'? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute. Variety without end and never equalled, unless, perhaps, by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thresh his old jacket, till I made his pension jingle in his pocket.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room; our love attends yourself, Mrs. Unwin, and Miss Shuttleworth, not forgetting the two miniature pictures at your elbow.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 14, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your approbation of my last Heliconian present encourages me to send you another. I wrote it, indeed, on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and

putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from the surface.

‘On the Promotion of Edward Thurlow,’ etc.  
—Yours affectionately,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 2, 1779.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—How quick is the succession of human events! The cares of to-day are seldom the cares of to-morrow; and when we lie down at night, we may safely say to most of our troubles—‘Ye have done your worst, and we shall meet no more.’

This observation was suggested to me by reading your last letter; which, though I have written since I received it, I have never answered. When that epistle passed under your pen, you were miserable about your tithes, and your imagination was hung round with pictures, that terrified you to such a degree as made even the receipt of money burdensome. But it is all over now. You sent away your farmers in good humour (for you can make people merry whenever you please), and now you have nothing to do but to clink your purse, and laugh at what is past. Your delicacy makes you groan under that which other men never feel, or feel but slightly. A fly that settles upon the tip of the nose is troublesome; and this is a comparison adequate to the most that mankind in general are sensible of, upon such tiny occasions. But the flies that pester you always get between your eyelids, where the annoyance is almost insupportable.

I would follow your advice, and endeavour to

furnish Lord North with a scheme of supplies for the ensuing year, if the difficulty I find in answering the call of my own emergencies did not make me despair of satisfying those of the nation. I can say but this; if I had ten acres of land in the world, whereas I have not one, and in those ten acres should discover a gold mine, richer than all Mexico and Peru, when I had reserved a few ounces for my own annual supply, I would willingly give the rest to government. My ambition would be more gratified by annihilating the national incumbrances, than by going daily down to the bottom of a mine to wallow in my own emolument. This is patriotism, you will allow; but, alas, this virtue is for the most part in the hands of those who can do no good with it! He that has but a single handful of it, catches so greedily at the first opportunity of growing rich, that his patriotism drops to the ground, and he grasps the gold instead of it. He that never meets with such an opportunity, holds it fast in his clenched fists, and says—‘Oh, how much good I would do, if I could! ’

I thank you for your interest employed to procure me a place in the paper, perhaps I may use it; but I am not always in a humour to appear in print. What follows is for private use:—

Human frailty,<sup>1</sup>  
Weak and irresolute is man, etc.  
(Six stanzas.)

Your mother says, Pray send my dear love.  
There is hardly room to add mine, but you will suppose it.—Yours,                                   W.M. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> *Globe edition, p. 166.*

In January 1780, after a ministry at Olney of sixteen years, the Rev. John Newton removed to London, having been presented with the living of St. Mary Woolnoth, in Lombard Street. Cowper greatly missed his friend; but the gap was partly filled through the thoughtfulness of Newton, who introduced to the poet the Rev. William Bull, the amiable and gifted Congregational minister of Newport Pagnell. Cowper soon became as much attached to Bull as Newton and Bull had been to each other, and many a pipe did ‘Dear Taureau’ smoke in Cowper’s parlour, or the nutshell of a Summer-house at Olney.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 13, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The last of your mother’s two reasons for not writing sooner must serve as an apology for me. Uncertain when you would go to town, I chose to stay till that affair was decided. I am to thank you for your portraits taken from the life in the House of Commons, not forgetting the Chancellor, the Duke of Richmond, and the Bishops’ wigs. Mr. Burke’s mispronunciation of the word *vectigal* brings to my remembrance a jocular altercation that passed when I was once in the gallery, between Mr. Rigby and the late Alderman Beckford. The latter was a very incorrect speaker, and the former, I imagine, not a very accurate scholar. He ventured, however, upon a quotation from Terence, and delivered it thus, *Sine Scelere et Baccho friget Venus.* The Alderman interrupted him, was very severe upon his mistake, and restored

Ceres to her place in the sentence. Mr. Rigby replied that he was obliged to his worthy friend for teaching him Latin, and would take the first opportunity to return the favour by teaching him English.

You are not alone, I believe, in thinking that you see a striking resemblance between the reign of his present majesty and that of Charles the First. The undue extension of the influence of the crown; the discountenancing and displacing of men obnoxious to the court, though otherwise men of unexceptionable conduct and character; the waste of the public money, and especially the suspicion that obtains of a fixed design in government to favour the cause of Popery, are features common to both faces. Again these causes have begun to produce the same effects now as they did in the reign of that unhappy monarch. It is long since I saw Lord Clarendon's account of it; but unless my memory fails me much, I think you will find (and, indeed, it could hardly be otherwise) that the leaders of the discontented party, and the several counties in their interest, had a good understanding with each other, and devised means for the communication of intelligence much like our modern committees of correspondence. You ask my opinion of the tendency of such associations. No, I mistake; you do not ask mine, but you give your own, which is exactly according to my own sentiments. Indeed they are explicit enough; and if one was inclined to suppose their intentions peaceable, they have taken care that the supposition shall be groundless. A year ago they expressed their wishes that the people would rise, and their astonishment that they did not.

Now, they tell government plainly that the spirit of resistance is gone forth, that the nation is at last roused, that they will fly to arms upon the next provocation, and bid them slight the Yorkshire petition at their peril. Sir George Saville's speech reminded me of that line in which is described the opening of the Temple of Janus, a ceremony that obtained as the established prelude to a war:—

*Discordia tetra  
Bellum ferratos postes, portusque refregit.*

It seems clear, then, that hostilities are intended as the last resource. As to the time they choose for the purpose, it is, in my mind, the worst they could have chosen. So many gentlemen of the first rank and property in the kingdom, resolutely bent upon their purpose, their design professedly so laudable, and their means of compassing it so formidable, would command attention at any time. A quarrel of this kind, even if it proceeded to the last extremity, might possibly be settled without the ruin of the country, while there was peace with the neighbouring kingdoms; but while there is war abroad, such an extensive war as the present, I fear it cannot.

I add to what your mother says about Indian ink—a few brushes, and a pencil or two, with any thing else that may be considered convenient for the use of a beginner, as far as five shillings. I do not think my talent in the art worth more. She desires me to remind you of your promised vote and interest for a place in Christ's Hospital, of which, she understands, you are now a governor; and the parcel may come by the waggon, which it will do if it is sent

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on a Wednesday to the Windmill in St. John Street.

Any money that remains may be sent with it.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb 27, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As you are pleased to desire my letters, I am the more pleased with writing them; though at the same time I must needs testify my surprise that you should think them worth receiving, as I seldom send one that I think favourably of myself. This is not to be understood as an imputation upon your taste or judgment, but as an encomium upon my own modesty and humility, which I desire you to remark well. It is a just observation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that though men of ordinary talents may be highly satisfied with their own productions, men of true genius never are. Whatever be their subject, they always seem to themselves to fall short of it, even when they seem to others most to excel. And for this reason—because they have a certain sublime sense of perfection, which other men are strangers to, and which they themselves in their performances are not able to exemplify. Your servant, Sir Joshua! I little thought of seeing you when I began; but as you have popped in you are welcome.

When I wrote last, I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses entitled the ‘Modern Patriot’,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Rebellion is my theme all day’ (*see* Globe edition, p. 166). The ‘Modern Patriot’ was intended for a description of Burke on account of the line which he took on the American and Roman Catholic questions. Cowper, however, as this letter shows, feeling that his poem was unjust, burnt it. He either kept a copy, however, or re-wrote the poem.

but was not quite pleased with a line or two, which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and with the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well-deserved satire in the morning, in the evening becomes a libel; the author commences his own judge, and while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers. Alas! what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet; I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking wit has produced the following, the subject of which is more important than the manner in which I have treated it seems to imply, but a fable may speak truth, and all truth is sterling; I only premise, that in a philosophical tract in the Register, I found it asserted that the glowworm is the nightingale's proper food.<sup>1</sup>

Have you heard? who has not? for a commendatory advertisement of it is already published—

<sup>1</sup> This Letter contains the fable of the Nightingale and the Glowworm.

that a certain kinsman<sup>1</sup> of your humble servant's has written a tract,<sup>2</sup> now in the press, to prove polygamy a divine institution! A plurality of wives is intended, but not of husbands. The end proposed by the author is to remedy the prevailing practice of adultery<sup>3</sup> by making the female delinquent *ipso facto* the lawful wife of the male. An officer of a regiment, part of which is quartered here, gave one of the soldiers leave to be drunk six weeks, in hopes of curing him by satiety:—he was drunk six weeks and is so still, as often as he can find an opportunity. One vice may swallow up another, but no coroner in the state of Ethics ever brought in his verdict, when a vice died, that it was—*felo de se*.

They who value the man are sorry for his book; the rest say—

*'Solvuntur risu tabulae, tu missus abibis.'*

Thanks for all you have done, and all you intend; the biography will be particularly welcome. My truly affectionate respects attend you all.—Yours,  
W. C.

When you feel postage a burden send me some franks.

TO MRS. NEWTON

*March 4, 1780.*

DEAR MADAM,—To communicate surprise is almost, perhaps quite, as agreeable as to receive it. This is my present motive for writing to you rather than to Mr. Newton. He would be pleased with hearing from me, but he would not be surprised

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Martin Madan, Cowper's cousin.

<sup>2</sup> *Thelyphthora.*

<sup>3</sup> Evidently Cowper should have said 'seduction.'

at it; you see, therefore, I am selfish upon the present occasion, and principally consult my own gratification. Indeed, if I consulted yours, I should be silent, for I have no such budget as the minister's, furnished and stuffed with ways and means for every emergency, and shall find it difficult, perhaps, to raise supplies even for a short epistle.

- You have observed in common conversation that the man who coughs and blows his nose the oftenest (I mean if he has not a cold), does it because he has
- nothing to say. Even so it is in letter-writing : a long preface, such as mine, is an ugly symptom, and always forebodes great sterility in the following pages.

The vicarage-house became a melancholy object, as soon as Mr. Newton had left it; when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family; even I cannot look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening, I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, that used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there, but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. Page<sup>1</sup> goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; and though in many respects I have no more sensibility left than there is in brick and mortar, yet I am not

<sup>1</sup> Rev. B. Page, Mr. Newton's successor as curate of Olney.

permitted to be quite unfeeling upon this subject. If I were in a condition to leave Olney, too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre ; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of ; they fear they shall find themselves great sufferers by the alteration that has taken place ; they would have had reason to fear it in any case. But Mr. Newton's successor does not bring with him the happiest presages, so that in the present state of things they have double reason for their fears. Though I can never be the better for Mr. Page, Mr. Page shall never be the worse for me. If his conduct should even justify the worst apprehensions that have been formed of his character, it is no personal concern of mine. But this I can venture to say, that if he is not spotless, his spots will be seen, and the plainer, because he comes after Mr. Newton.

We were concerned at your account of Robert, and have little doubt but he will shuffle himself out of his place. Where he will find another, is a question not to be resolved by those who recommended him to this. I wrote him a long letter a day or two after the receipt of yours, but I am afraid it was only clapping a blister upon the crown of a wig-block.

My respects attend Mr. Newton and yourself,

accompanied with much affection for you both.—  
Yours, dear Madam,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*March 16, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If I had had the horns of a snail, I should have drawn them in the moment I saw the reason of your epistolary brevity, because I felt it too. May your seven reams be multiplied into fourteen, till your letters become truly Lace-dæmonian, and are reduced to a single syllable. Though I shall be a sufferer by the effect, I shall rejoice in the cause. You are naturally formed for business, and such a head as yours can never have too much of it. Though my predictions have been fulfilled in two instances, I do not plume myself much upon my sagacity; because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be chancellor, and that you would have a crowded office. As to the rest of my connections, there, too, I have given proof of equal foresight, with not a jot more reason for vanity. Anybody might see that they were too much like myself to be good for any thing; disqualified by temper, and unfurnished with abilities to be useful either to themselves or others.

To use the phrase of all who ever wrote upon the state of Europe, the political horizon is dark indeed. The cloud has been thickening, and the thunder advancing many years. The storm now seems to be vertical, and threatens to burst upon the land, as if, with the next clap, it would shake all to pieces. I did not know (for I know nothing but what I learn from the General Evening) that there was a

deliberate purpose on the part of government, to set up the throne of despotism. If that is the case, no doubt but the standard of opposition will flame against it, till it has consumed to ashes the devisers of a project that in this country is sure to terminate in the ruin of those that form it. Alas, of what use is history, and why should kings be taught to read, if they read to so little purpose? As for me, I am no Quaker, except where military matters are in question, and there I am much of the same mind with an honest man, who, when he was forced into the service, declared he would not fight, and gave this reason—because he saw nothing worth fighting for. You will say, perhaps, Is not liberty worth a struggle? True; but will success ensure it to me? Might I not, like the Americans, emancipate myself from one master, only to serve a score, and, with laurels upon my brow, sigh for my former chains again?

Many thanks for your kind invitation. Ditto to Mrs. Hill, for the seeds—unexpected, and therefore the more welcome. I have not a leg that is not tied to Olney; and if they were all at liberty, not one of them all would hop to London. The thought of it distresses me; the sight of it would craze me.

You gave me great pleasure by what you say of my uncle. His motto shall be— .

*Hic ver perpetuum atque alienis mensibus aestas.*

I remember the time when I have been kept waking by the fear that he would die before me; but now, I think, I shall grow old first.—Yours, my dear friend,  
affectionately,

W. C.

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TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*March 18, 1780.*

I AM obliged to you for the communication of your correspondence with Mr. Madan.<sup>1</sup> It was impossible for any man, of any temper whatever, and however wedded to his own purpose, to resent so gentle and friendly an exhortation as you sent him. Men of lively imaginations are not often remarkable for solidity of judgment. They have generally strong passions to bias it, and are led far away from their proper road, in pursuit of pretty phantoms of their own creating. No law ever did or can effect what he has ascribed to that of Moses; it is reserved for Mercy to subdue the corrupt inclinations of mankind, which threatenings and penalties, through the depravity of the heart, have always had a tendency rather to inflame.

The love of power seems as natural to kings as the desire of liberty is to their subjects; the excess of either is vicious, and tends to the ruin of both. There are many, I believe, who wish the present corrupt state of things dissolved, in hope that the pure primitive constitution will spring up from the ruins. But it is not for man by himself, to bring order out of confusion; the progress from one to the other is not natural, much less necessary, and without the intervention of divine aid, impossible; and they who are for making the hazardous experiment, would certainly find themselves disappointed.

—Affectionately yours,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Martin Madan, who was about to publish his *Thelyphthora*. (See letter of 27th Feb. 1780.) Lady Huntingdon and the other leading evangelicals tried very hard to persuade Mr. Madan not to publish this book.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 28, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have heard nothing more from Mr. Newton upon the subject you mention; but I dare say that, having been given to expect the benefit of your nomination in behalf of his nephew, he still depends upon it. His obligations to Mr. Thornton have been so numerous, and so weighty, that though he has, in a few instances, prevailed upon himself to recommend an object now and then to his patronage, he has very sparingly, if at all, exerted his interest with him in behalf of his own relations. The best way to reconcile yourself to this application of your bounty will be to consider that your principal and main intention in it is to oblige your mother. As to the boy—

‘To whom related, or by whom begot,’

is a very unimportant part of the subject.

With respect to the advice you are required to give to a young lady, that she may be properly instructed in the manner of keeping the sabbath, you are so well qualified for the task yourself, that it is impossible you should need any assistance; at least it is hardly possible that I should afford you any, who consider myself as no longer interested in the question. As you desire it, however, and I am not willing to refuse you the little that is in my power, I just subjoin a few hints that have occurred to me upon the occasion; not because I think you want them, but because it would seem unkind to withhold them. The sabbath then, I think, may be considered—

1st. As a commandment, no less binding upon modern Christians than upon ancient Jews; because the spiritual people amongst them did not think it enough to abstain from manual occupations upon that day, but, entering more deeply into the meaning of the precept, allotted those hours they took from the world to the cultivation of holiness in their own souls—which ever was, and ever will be, a duty incumbent upon all who ever heard of a sabbath, and is of perpetual obligation both upon Jews and Christians (the commandment, therefore, enjoins it; the prophets have also enforced it; and in many instances, both scriptural and modern, the breach of it has been punished with a providential and judicial severity that may make bystanders tremble).

2nd. As a privilege, which you well know how to dilate upon, better than I can tell you.

3rd. As a sign of that covenant by which believers are entitled to a rest that yet remaineth.

4th. As the *sine qua non* of the Christian character; and upon this head I should guard against being misunderstood to mean no more than two attendances upon public worship, which is a form complied with by thousands who never kept a sabbath in their lives. Consistency is necessary to give substance and solidity to the whole. To sanctify the day at church, and to trifle it away out of church, is profanation, and vitiates all. After all, I could ask my catechumen one short question—‘Do you love the day, or do you not? If you love it, you will never inquire how far you may safely deprive yourself of the enjoyment of it. If you do not love it, and you find yourself obliged in conscience to acknowledge it, that is an alarming

symptom, and ought to make you tremble. If you do not love it, then it is a weariness to you, and you wish it was over. The ideas of labour and rest are not more opposite to each other than the idea of a sabbath, and that dislike and disgust with which it fills the souls of thousands to be obliged to keep it. It is worse than bodily labour, more fatiguing than the drudgery of an ass.'

I thank you for the intended salmon, etc. We are sorry for Mrs. Unwin's tooth. I had a troublesome stump myself, which I killed with oil of thyme, and now it is easy. We are sorry, too, for Miss Shuttleworth's complaint, but it is a symptom of a good constitution, and in some sort a pledge of good health, tho' a painful one. We rejoice in the well-being of your little ones, and I am in haste to save the post.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*April 6, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I never was, any more than yourself, a friend to pluralities; they are generally found in the hands of the avaricious, whose insatiable hunger after preferment proves them unworthy of any at all. They attend much to the regular payment of their dues, but not at all to the spiritual interests of their parishioners. Having forgot their duty, or never known it, they differ in nothing from the laity, except their outward garb, and their exclusive right to the desk and pulpit. But when pluralities seek the man, instead of being sought by him; and when the man is honest, conscientious,

and pious; careful to employ a substitute in those respects like himself; and, not contented with this, will see with his own eyes that the concerns of his parishes are decently and diligently administered; in that case, considering the present dearth of such characters in the ministry, I think it an event advantageous to the people, and much to be desired by all who regret the great and apparent want of sobriety and earnestness among the clergy. A man who does not seek a living merely as a pecuniary emolument, has no need, in my judgment, to refuse one because it is so. He means to do his duty, and by doing it he earns his wages. The two Ramsdens being contiguous to each other, and falling easily under the care of one pastor, and both so near to Stock<sup>1</sup> that you can visit them without difficulty, as often as you please, I see no reasonable objection, nor does your mother. As to the wry-mouthed sneers and illiberal misconstructions of the censorious, I know no better shield to guard you against them than what you are already furnished with—a clear and unoffended conscience.

The salmon came safe and punctual to its assignation; it served us for two dinners and six suppers, was remarkably fresh and fine. Item, the lobster.

I am obliged to you for what you said upon the subject of book-buying, and am very fond of availing myself of another man's pocket, when I can do it creditably to myself, and without injury to him. Amusements are necessary, in a retirement like mine, especially in such a state of mind as I labour

<sup>1</sup> Stock, five miles south-west of Chelmsford. Ramsden Belhouse and Ramsden Crays each about four miles from Stock.

under. The necessity of amusement makes me sometimes write verses; it made me a carpenter, — a bird-cage maker, a gardener; and has lately taught me to draw, and to draw too with such surprising proficiency in the art, considering my total ignorance of it two months ago, that when I show your mother my productions, she is all admiration and applause.

You need never fear the communication of what you intrust to us in confidence. You know your mother's delicacy in this point sufficiently; and as for me, I once wrote a *Connoisseur*<sup>1</sup> upon the subject of secret-keeping, and from that day to this I believe I have never divulged one.

We were much pleased with Mr. Newton's application to you for a charity sermon, and with what he said upon that subject in his last letter, 'that he was glad of an opportunity to give you that proof of his regard.'

Believe me yours, with the customary, but not therefore unmeaning addition of love to all under your roof. Your mother sends hers, which, being maternal, is put up in a separate parcel. W. C.

#### TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Olney, April 16, 1780.*

SINCE I wrote my last we have had a visit from \_\_\_\_\_. I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance, from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I

<sup>1</sup> No. 119 'On keeping a Secret' in the year 1756. Cowper contributed four other papers to the *Connoisseur* that year. It was edited by Colman and Thornton.

judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise, they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They, perhaps, flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. — could have killed them both in another hour.

W. C.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 3, 1780.*

DEAR SIR,—You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment, that I have no excuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you, for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe that I am the only man alive from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste; but my leaf gold is

tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me that you will read my letters. I am not fond of long-winded metaphors ; I have always observed that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so do mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by poets and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them ; and her praise, and my praise put together, are fame enough for me. O ! I could spend whole days and moonlight nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect ! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might perhaps be many miserable men among them, but not an unawakened one could be found from the arctic to the antarctic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so ; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth—what are the planets—what is the sun itself but a bauble ? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, ‘The Maker of all these wonders is my friend !’ Their eyes have never been opened to see that they are trifles ; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large

conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back, and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself, ‘This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.’ W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Olney, May 6, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am much obliged to you for your speedy answer to my queries. I know less of the law than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connection with the profession has got wind; and though I earnestly profess, and protest, and proclaim it abroad that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once endued with a legal periwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have had the good fortune to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, has advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the

right side of the question is just as useful to his client as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities.

These violent attacks of a distemper so often fatal, are very alarming to all who esteem and respect the Chancellor as he deserves. A life of confinement, and of anxious attention to important objects, where the habit is bilious to such a terrible degree, threatens to be but a short one; and I wish he may not be made a text for men of reflection to moralise upon, affording a conspicuous instance of the transient and fading nature of all human accomplishments and attainments.—Yours affectionately, W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*May 8, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I would advise you by all means to deal frankly with your competitor, if he should pay you the visit you expect; it will infallibly obviate all possibility of misconstruction, and is the only course you can take that will do so. You have a very good story to tell, and nothing to be ashamed of; and as for the awkwardness of the occasion, that will be no longer felt than just while you are making your exordium. Your behaviour will please him if he has a taste for propriety, and he cannot but forgive you the crime of having an uncle that loves you too well to overlook or neglect so fair an opportunity to promote your interest.

My scribbling humour has of late been entirely absorbed in the passion for landscape drawing. It

is a most amusing art, and, like every other art, requires much practice and attention.

*Nil sine multo  
Vita labore dedit mortalibus.*

- Excellence is providentially placed beyond the reach of indolence, that success may be the reward of industry, and that idleness may be punished with obscurity and disgrace. So long as I am pleased with an employment, I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind. I never received a *little* pleasure from any thing in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this
- temperature is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue. Hence I draw an unfavourable prognostic, and expect that I shall shortly be constrained to look out for something else. Then perhaps I may string the lyre again, and be able to comply with your demand.

Now for the visit you propose to pay us, and propose not to pay us; the hope of which plays about upon your paper like a jack-o'-lantern upon the ceiling. This is no mean simile, for Virgil (you remember) uses it. It is here, it is there, it vanishes, it returns, it dazzles you, a cloud interposes, and it is gone. However just the comparison, I hope you will contrive to spoil it, and that your final determination will be to come. As to the masons you expect, bring them with you;—bring brick, bring

mortar, bring every thing that would oppose itself to your journey ;— all shall be welcome. I have a greenhouse that is too small, come and enlarge it; build me a pinery; repair the garden wall, that has great need of your assistance; do any thing; you cannot do too much; so far from thinking you and your train troublesome, we shall rejoice to see you, upon these or upon any other terms you can propose. But to be serious—you will do well to consider that a long summer is before you; that the party will not have such another opportunity to meet this great while; that you may finish your masonry long enough before winter, though you should not begin this month, but that you cannot always find your brother and sister Powley at Olney. These, and some other considerations, such as the desire we have to see you, and the pleasure we expect from seeing you all together, may, and, I think, ought to overcome your scruples. We are sorry Miss Shuttleworth<sup>1</sup> cannot come with you, which seems to be set down as a postulation not to be disputed.

From a general recollection of Lord Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, I thought (and I remember I told you so) that there was a striking resemblance between that period and the present. But I am now reading, and have read three volumes of Hume's *History*, one of which is engrossed entirely by that subject. There I see reason to alter my opinion, and the seeming resemblance has disappeared upon a more particular information. Charles succeeded to a long train of arbitrary princes, whose subjects had tamely acquiesced in

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. W. Unwin's sister. It was to her Cowper wrote the lines, 'Sweet stream that winds through yonder glade' (Globe edition, p. 164).

the despotism of their masters, till their privileges were all forgot. He did but tread in their steps, and exemplify the principles in which he had been brought up, when he oppressed his people. But just at that time, unhappily for the monarch, the subject began to see, and to see that he had a right to property and freedom. This marks a sufficient difference between the disputes of that day and the present. But there was another main cause of that rebellion, which at this time does not operate at all. The king was devoted to the hierarchy; his subjects were puritans and would not bear it. Every circumstance of ecclesiastical order and discipline was an abomination to them, and in his esteem an indispensable duty. And though at last he was obliged to give up many things, he would not abolish episcopacy; and till that were done his concessions could have no conciliating effect. These two concurring causes were indeed sufficient to set three kingdoms in a flame. But they subsist not now, nor any other, I hope, notwithstanding the bustle made by the patriots, equal to the production of such terrible events.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER

*May 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I do not write to comfort you; that office is not likely to be well performed by one who has no comfort for himself; nor to comply with an impertinent ceremony, which in general might well be spared upon such occasions; but because I would not seem indifferent to the

concerns of those I have so much reason to esteem and love. If I did not sorrow for your brother's death, I should expect that nobody would for mine; when I knew him, he was much beloved, and I doubt not continued to be so. To live and die together is the lot of a few happy families, who hardly know what a separation means, and one sepulchre serves them all; but the ashes of our kindred are dispersed indeed. Whether the American gulf has swallowed up any other of my relations, I know not; it has made many mourners.

Believe me, my dear cousin, though after a long silence, which perhaps nothing less than the present concern could have prevailed with me to interrupt, as much as ever, your affectionate kinsman,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

May 10, 1780.<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If authors could have lived to adjust and authenticate their own text, a commentator would have been a useless creature. For instance—if Dr. Bentley<sup>2</sup> had found, or opined that he had found, the word tube, where it seemed to

<sup>1</sup> For the letter from Newton to Cowper of 6th May 1780, with humorous account of 'Beating the Bounds,' see Bull's *Letters by the Rev. John Newton*. Says Newton: 'How wonderful is that tincture which gives your sentiments when you speak of yourself as of so gloomy a cast, while in all other respects it leaves your faculties in full bloom and vigour.' He asks Cowper to send him 'a few mountains and valleys, woods and streams, and ducks,' to ornament the walls of his study. 'Let the great boast of their Raphaels and their Titians, it shall suffice for me if I may inscribe on the pieces in my study—W. C., pinxit.'

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bentley (1662-1742), the famous scholar, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.

present itself to you, and had judged the subject worthy of his critical acumen, he would either have justified the corrupt reading, or have substituted some invention of his own, in defence of which he would have exerted all his polemical abilities, and have quarrelled with half the literati in Europe. Then suppose the writer himself, as in the present case, to interpose with a gentle whisper thus—‘If you look again, Doctor, you will perceive that what appears to you to be *tube*, is neither more nor less than the simple monosyllable *ink*, but I wrote it in great haste, and the want of sufficient precision in the character has occasioned your mistake: *you* will be especially satisfied when you see the sense<sup>1</sup> elucidated by the explanation.’ But I question whether the doctor would quit his ground, or allow any author to be a competent judge in his own case. The world, however, would acquiesce immediately, and vote the critic useless.

James Andrews,<sup>2</sup> who is my Michael Angelo, pays me many compliments on my success in the art of drawing, but I have not yet the vanity to think myself qualified to furnish your apartment. If I

<sup>1</sup> See letter of 3rd May 1780, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> James Andrews, the Olney painter and sculptor. As a painter, his style was similar to that of Wright of Derby. Many of his paintings were destroyed at the Great Fire of 1854. There are scores of carved gravestones by him in the churchyards of Olney and Weston, the most notable being:—

The Farmyard Stone, Olney, to William Lambry.

The Death and Shears Stone, Olney, to George Gee.

The Two Coffins Stone, Weston, to Andrew and Sarah Blower.

See *The Town of Cowper* (2nd edition), p. 94.

James Andrews died in 1817, and is buried in Olney Churchyard. His gravestone—probably carved by himself—is embellished with three wheat-sheaves, a fitting emblem of his own fecundity.

should ever attain to the degree of self-opinion requisite to such an undertaking, I shall labour at it with pleasure.<sup>1</sup> I can only say, though I hope not with the affected modesty of the above-mentioned Dr. Bentley, who said the same thing—

*Me quoque dicunt  
Vatem pastores. Sed non Ego credulus illis.*

A crow, rook, or raven has built a nest in one of the young elm trees, at the side of Mrs. Aspray's orchard.<sup>2</sup> In the violent storm that blew yesterday morning, I saw it agitated to a degree that seemed to threaten its immediate destruction, and versified the following thoughts upon the occasion.

W. C.

Then followed the ‘Fable of the Raven.’

On the 31st of May 1780 appeared the Rev. Martin Madan's long-talked of book, *Thelyphthora, a Treatise on Female Ruin*. It fell in the Evangelical camp like a bombshell. A score of writers attacked it, and among them Cowper, who wrote and circulated privately his *Anti-Thelyphthora*. For months he could not get Mr. Madan out of his head, his letters, or his verse. King Charles the First did not give more trouble to Mr. Dick.

<sup>1</sup> For an engraving from one of Cowper's drawings, see *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1804.

<sup>2</sup> Guinea Field, between Cowper's house and the vicarage.

TO MRS. NEWTON

*5th June 1780.*

DEAR MADAM,—When I write to Mr. Newton, he answers me by letter; when I write to you, you answer me in fish. I return you many thanks for the mackerel and lobster. They assured me in terms as intelligible as pen and ink could have spoken, that you still remember Orchardside;<sup>1</sup> and though they never spoke in their lives, and it was still less to be expected from them that they should speak, being dead, they gave us an assurance of your affection that corresponds exactly with that which Mr. Newton expresses towards us in all his letters. For my own part, I never in my life began a letter more at a venture than the present. It is possible that I may finish it, but perhaps more than probable that I shall not. I have had several indifferent nights, and the wind is easterly; two circumstances so unfavourable to me in all my occupations, but especially that of writing, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could even bring myself to attempt it.

You have never yet perhaps been made acquainted with the unfortunate Tom Freeman's misadventure. He and his wife returning from Hanslope fair, were coming down Weston Lane; to wit, themselves, their horse, and their great wooden panniers, at ten o'clock at night. The horse having a lively imagination, and very weak nerves, fancied he either saw or heard something, but has never been able to say what. A sudden fright will impart activity, and a momentary vigour, even to lameness itself. Accordingly, he started, and sprung from the middle of the

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's house at Olney.

road to the side of it with such surprising alacrity, that he dismounted the gingerbread baker and his gingerbread wife in a moment. Not contented with this effort, nor thinking himself yet out of danger, he proceeded as fast as he could to a full gallop, rushed against the gate at the bottom of the lane, and opened it for himself, without perceiving that there was any gate there. Still he galloped, and with a velocity and momentum continually increasing, till he arrived in Olney. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when I heard the most uncommon and unaccountable noise that can be imagined. It was, in fact, occasioned by the clattering of tin pattypans and a Dutch-oven against the sides of the panniers. Much gingerbread was picked up in the street, and Mr. Lucy's windows were broken all to pieces. Had this been all, it would have been a comedy, but we learned the next morning that the poor woman's collar-bone was broken, and she has hardly been able to resume her occupation since.

What is added on the other side, if I could have persuaded myself to write sooner, would have reached you sooner; 'tis about ten days old. The first stanza will make you acquainted with the occasion of it:—

*Antithelyphthora.<sup>1</sup>*

Muse, mark the much-lamented day  
When like a tempest feared,  
First issuing on the last of May  
Thelyphthora appeared.

That fatal eve, &c.

The male Dove was smoking a pipe, and the

<sup>1</sup> Cowper subsequently omitted the first verse, and called the poem 'The Doves.'

female Dove was sewing, while she delivered herself as above. This little circumstance may lead you perhaps to guess what pair I had in my eye.—  
Yours, dear Madam,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 8, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is possible I might have indulged myself in the pleasure of writing to you, without waiting for a letter from you, but for a reason which you will not easily guess. Your mother communicated to me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining and clever, and so forth. Now you must know, I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend the eulogium you bestowed;—if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter;—where I joked once, I will joke five times, and for one sensible remark I will send him a dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a sentence was well turned, and every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing, therefore, to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of

me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only.

You are better skilled in ecclesiastical law than I am. Mrs. Powley desires me to inform her whether a parson can be obliged to take an apprentice. For some of her husband's opposers at Dewsbury threaten to clap one upon him. Now I think it would be rather hard if clergymen, who are not allowed to exercise any handicraft whatever, should be subject to such an imposition. If Mr. Powley was a cordwainer, or a breeches-maker, all the week, and a preacher only on Sundays, it would seem reasonable enough, in that case, that he should take an apprentice, if he chose it. But even then, in my poor judgment, he ought to be left to his option. If they mean by an apprentice a pupil, whom they will oblige him to hew into a parson, and after chipping away the block that hides the minister within, to qualify him to stand erect in a pulpit—that indeed is another consideration. But still, we live in a free country, and I cannot bring myself even to suspect that an English divine can possibly be liable to such compulsion. Ask your uncle, however; for he is wiser in these things than either of us.

I thank you for your two inscriptions, and like the last the best; the thought is just and fine, but the two last lines are sadly damaged by the monkish jingle of *peperit* and *reperit*. I have not yet translated them, nor do I promise to do it, though at some idle hour perhaps I may. In return, I send you a translation of a simile in the 'Paradise Lost.' Not having that poem at hand, I cannot refer you to the book and page, but you may hunt

for it if you think it worth your while. It begins :—

‘ So when, from mountain tops, the dusky clouds  
Ascending,’ &c.

Quales aërii montis de vertice nubes  
Cum surgunt, et jam Boreæ tumida ora quiérunt,  
Cælum hilares abdit, spissæ caligine, vultus :  
Tùm si jucundo tandem sol prodeat ore,  
Et croceo montes et pascua lumine tingat,  
Gaudent omnia, aves mulcent concentibus agros,  
Balatuque ovium colles, vallesque resultant.

If you spy any fault in my Latin, tell me, for I am sometimes in doubt; but, as I told you when you was here, I have not a Latin book in the world to consult, or correct a mistake by; and some years have passed since I was a schoolboy.

*An English Verification of a Thought that popped into my Head about two Months since.*

Sweet stream! that winds through yonder glade—  
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid!—  
Silent, and chaste, she steals along,  
Far from the world's gay, busy throng;  
With gentle, yet prevailing force,  
Intent upon her destin'd course:  
Graceful, and useful, all she does,  
Blessing, and bless'd, where'er she goes:  
Pure-bosom'd, as that watery glass,  
And Heaven reflected in her face!

Now this is not so exclusively applicable to a maiden as to be the sole property of your sister Shuttleworth. If you look at Mrs. Unwin, you will see that she has not lost her right to this just praise by marrying you.

Your mother sends her love to all, and mine comes jogging along by the side of it.—Yours, W. C.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 12, 1780.*

DEAR SIR,—We accept it as an effort of your friendship that you could prevail with yourself in a time of such terror and distress to send us repeated accounts of yours and Mrs. Newton's welfare; you supposed, with reason enough, that we should be apprehensive for your safety, situated as you were, apparently, within the reach of so much danger. We rejoice that you have escaped it all, and that, except the anxiety which you must have felt, both for yourself and others, you have suffered nothing upon this dreadful occasion. A metropolis in flames<sup>1</sup> and a nation in ruins, are subjects of contemplation for such a mind as yours that will leave a lasting impression behind them. It is well that the design died in the execution, and will be buried, I hope never to rise again, in the ashes of its own combustion. There is a melancholy pleasure in looking back upon such a scene, arising from a comparison of possibilities with facts; the enormous bulk of the intended mischief with the abortive and partial accomplishment of it. Much was done, more indeed than could have been supposed practicable in a well-regulated city, not unfurnished with a military force for its protection. But surprise and astonishment seem at first to have struck every nerve of the police with a palsy, and to have disarmed government of all its powers.

I congratulate you upon the wisdom that withheld you from entering yourself a member of the Protestant association. Your friends who did so have reason enough to regret their doing it, even

<sup>1</sup> The Gordon Riots.

though they should never be called upon. Innocent as they are, and they who know them cannot doubt of their being perfectly so, it is likely to bring an odium on the profession they make, that will not soon be forgotten. Neither is it possible for a quiet, inoffensive man to discover, on a sudden, that his zeal has carried him into such company, without being to the last degree shocked at his imprudence. *Their religion was an honourable mantle, like that of Elijah; but the majority wore cloaks of Guy Fawkes's time, and meant nothing so little as what they pretended.*

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

June 18, 1780.

REVEREND AND DEAR WILLIAM,—The affairs of kingdoms, and the concerns of individuals, are variegated alike with the chequer-work of joy and sorrow. The news of a great acquisition in America has succeeded to terrible tumults in London; and the beams of prosperity are now playing upon the smoke of that conflagration which so lately terrified the whole land. These sudden changes, which are matter of every man's observation, and may therefore always be reasonably expected, serve to hold up the chin of despondency above water, and preserve mankind in general from the sin and misery of accounting existence a burden not to be endured; —an evil we should be sure to encounter, if we were not warranted to look for a bright reverse of our most afflictive experiences.

We are obliged to you for your early communication of the surrender of Charles Town, and rejoice with you in an event which, if my political spectacles

do not deceive me, is likely to bring the rebellion to a speedy end. The Spaniards were sick of the war at the very commencement of it; and I hope that, by this time, the French themselves begin to find themselves a little indisposed, if not desirous of peace, which that restless and meddling temper of theirs is incapable of desiring for its own sake. But is it true that this detestable plot was an egg laid in France and hatched in London, under the influence of French corruption?—*Nam te scire, deos quoniam propius contingis, oportet.* The offspring has the features of such a parent; and yet, without the clearest proof of the fact, I would not willingly charge upon a civilised nation what perhaps the most barbarous would abhor the thought of. I no sooner saw the surmise however in the paper, than I immediately began to write Latin verses upon the occasion. ‘An odd effect,’ you will say, ‘of such a circumstance:’—but an effect, nevertheless, that whatever has, at any time, moved my passions whether pleasantly or otherwise, has always had upon me: were I to express what I feel upon such occasions in prose, it would be verbose, inflated, and disgusting. I therefore have recourse to verse, as a suitable vehicle for the most vehement expressions my thoughts suggest to me. What I have written, I did not write so much for the comfort of the English as for the mortification of the French. You will immediately perceive, therefore, that I have been labouring in vain, and that this bouncing explosion is likely to spend itself in the air. For I have no means of circulating what follows through all the French territories; and unless that, or something like it, can be done, my indignation will be

entirely fruitless. Tell me how I can convey it into Sartine's pocket, or who will lay it upon his desk for me. But read it first, and unless you think it pointed enough to sting the Gaul to the quick, burn it.

*In seditionem horrendam, corruptelis Gallicis, ut fertur, Londini  
nuper exortam.*

' *Perfida, crudelis, victa et lymphata furore,  
Non armis, laurum Gallia fraude petit.  
Venalem pretio plebem conducit, et urit  
Undique privatas patriciasque domos.*

*Nequicquam conata suâ, födissima sperat  
Posse tamen nostrâ nos superare manu.  
Gallia, vana struis ! Precibus nunc utere ! Vinces,  
Nam mites timidis, supplicibusque sumus.'*<sup>1</sup>

I have lately exercised my ingenuity in contriving an exercise for yours, and have composed a riddle, which, if it does not make you laugh before you have solved it, will probably do it afterwards. I would transcribe it now, but am really so fatigued with writing, that unless I knew you had a quinsy, and that a fit of laughter might possibly save your life, I could not prevail with myself to do it.

What could you possibly mean, slender as you are, by sallying out upon your two-walking-sticks at two in the morning, into the midst of such a tumult? We admire your prowess, but cannot commend your prudence.

Our joint love attends you all, collectively and individually.—Yours,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> For translation, see Globe Edition, p. 335. Cowper had read that the Gordon riots were planned by France, and set on foot by French bribes.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 22, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A word or two in answer to two or three questions of yours, which I have hitherto taken no notice of. I am not in a - scribbling mood, and shall therefore make no excursions to amuse either myself or you. The needful will be as much as I can manage at present; the playful must wait for another opportunity.

Your sister is possessed as you suspect, both of the price and the purchase, and has left no salt of lemons behind her. This will distress her not a little when she recollects it; but I can tell you one thing for your comfort, that the salt in question will most certainly be forthcoming when she sees you next, even if that event should not take place till you are both greyheaded.

I thank you for your offer of Robertson;<sup>1</sup> but I have more reading upon my hands at this present writing than I shall get rid of in a twelvemonth: and this moment recollect that I have seen it already. He is an author that I admire much, with one exception, that I think his style is too laboured. Hume, as an historian, pleases me more.

I have read just enough of the *Biographia Britannica* to say that I have tasted it, and have no doubt but I shall like it. I am pretty much in the garden at this season of the year, so read but little. In summer time I am as giddy-headed as a boy, and can settle to nothing. Winter condenses .

<sup>1</sup> Works of William Robertson the historian (1721-1793).

— me, and makes me lumpish and sober; and then I can read all day long.

For the same reasons, I have no need of the landscapes at present; when I want them I will renew my application, and repeat the description, but it will hardly be before October.

I congratulate you upon a duplicate of Ramsdens. As your charge is become twofold, may your satisfaction be so too. Mine is sure to be doubled, because you have promised me a present of salmon.

Before I arose this morning, I composed the three following stanzas; I send them because I like them pretty well myself; and if you should not, you must accept this handsome compliment as an amends for their deficiencies.

I have only time to add love, &c., and my two initials.

W. C.

You may print the lines if you judge them worth it.<sup>1</sup>

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*June 23, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your reflections upon the state of London, the sins and enormities of that great city, while you had a distant view of it from Greenwich, seem to have been prophetic of the heavy stroke that fell upon it just after. Man often prophesies without knowing it; a spirit speaks by him which is not his own, though he does not at that time suspect that he is under the influence of any other. Did he foresee what is always foreseen

<sup>1</sup> On the burning of Lord Mansfield's library, &c.

by Him who dictates what he supposes to be his own, he would suffer by anticipation, as well as by consequence ; and wish perhaps as ardently for the happy ignorance, to which he is at present so much indebted, as some have foolishly and inconsiderately done for a knowledge that would be but another name for misery.

And why have I said all this ? especially to you, who have hitherto said it to me :—not because I had the least desire of informing a wiser man than myself, but because the observation was naturally suggested by the recollection of your letter, and that letter, though not the last, happened to be uppermost in my mind. I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more than to a board that is under the carpenter's plane (I mean while I am writing to you), the shavings are my uppermost thoughts ; after a few strokes of the tool, it acquires a new surface ; this again, upon a repetition of his task, he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds : whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your acceptance, I know not ; I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor of mahogany, but *Truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum* ; consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last.

It is not strange that you should be the subject of a false report ; for the sword of slander, like that of war, devours one as well as another ; and a blameless character is particularly delicious to its unsparing appetite. But that you should be the object of such a report, you who meddle less with the designs of government than almost any man that lives under it, this is strange indeed. It is well, however, when

they who account it good sport to traduce the reputation of another invent a story that refutes itself. I wonder they do not always endeavour to accommodate their fiction to the real character of the person: their tale would then at least have an air of probability, and it might cost a peaceable good man much more trouble to disprove it. But perhaps it would not be easy to discern what part of your invention lies more open to such an attempt than another: or what it is that you either say or do, at any time, that presents a fair opportunity to the most ingenious slanderer to slip in a falsehood between your words or actions, that shall seem to be at a point with either. You hate compliment. I know, but to your leave this is not one—it is a friend—where and where? now I have gained you under my roof, you must thank yourself for it: it was when I was writing the last invention on my hand, and perceived from a fact that as far as I can remember, was never guilty of flattery since I knew her to have it. The first satisfies me, names the beauty even; I am, and by that flatters me, while—else how could she live when I look in the glass of magnifying? yet most disgraceful to her! I had as yet no tailor made any complements on her, and instead of flattery as that any man should call it, French calls a compliment. The tailor took warning not at all concealed my suit, nor the flattery hidden me at all the worse. I never made a present to my friend of virtue; I hardly offend. Now I have reached the conclusion of this. I will not trouble to farther you.

We have sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth, before this writing him to interest a parliament in

behalf of the poor lace-makers. I say we, because I have signed it; Mr. G. drew it up, Mr. —— did not think it grammatical, therefore he would not sign it. Yet I think Priscian himself would have pardoned the manner for the sake of the matter. I dare say if his lordship does not comply with the prayer of it, it will not be because he thinks it of more consequence to write grammatically than that the poor should eat, but for some better reason. My love to all under your roof.—Yours,

W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 2, 1780.*

CARISSIME,—I am glad of your confidence, and have reason to hope I shall never abuse it. If you trust me with a secret, I am hermetically sealed; and if you call for the exercise of my judgment, such as it is, I am never freakish or wanton in the use of it, much less mischievous and malignant. Critics, I believe, do not often stand so clear of these vices as I do. I like your epitaph, except that I doubt the propriety of the word *immaturus*; which, I think, is rather applicable to fruits than flowers; and except the last pentameter, the assertion it contains being rather too obvious a thought to finish with: not that I think an epitaph should be pointed like an epigram. But still there is a closeness of thought and expression necessary in the conclusion of all these little things, that they may leave an agreeable flavour upon the palate. Whatever is short, should be nervous, masculine, and compact. Little men are so; and little poems should be so; because, where the work is short, the author has no right to

the plea of weariness ; and laziness is never admitted as an available excuse in any thing. Now you know my opinion, you will very likely improve upon my improvement, and alter my alterations for the better.

- To touch and retouch is, though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself; and if you would take as much pains as I do, you would have no need to ask for my corrections.

*Hic sepultus est  
Inter suorum lacrymas  
GULIELMUS NORTHCOT,  
GULIELMI et MARIAE filius  
Unicus, unicè dilectus,  
Qui floris ritu succisus est semihiantis,  
Aprilis die septimo,  
1780, Æt. 10.*

*Care, vale ! Sed non æternum, care, valeto !  
Namque iterum tecum, sim modo dignus ero :  
Tum nihil amplexus poterit divellere nostros,  
Nec tu marcesces, nec lacrymabor ego.*

Having an English translation of it by me, I send it, though it may be of no use.

Farewell ! 'but not for ever,' Hope replies,  
'Trace but his steps, and meet him in the skies !'  
There nothing shall renew our parting pain,  
Thou shalt not wither, nor I weep again !

The stanzas that I sent you are maiden ones, having never been seen by any eye but your mother's and your own.

If you send me franks, I shall write longer letters.  
—*Valete, sicut et nos valemus! Amate, sicut et nos amamus.*

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 3, 1780.*

MON AMI.—By this time, I suppose, you have ventured to take your fingers out of your ears, being delivered from the deafening shouts of the most zealous mob that ever strained their lungs in the cause of religion. I congratulate you upon a gentle relapse into the customary sounds of a great city, which, though we rustics abhor them, as noisy and dissonant, are a musical and sweet murmur, compared with what you have lately heard. The tinkling of a kennel may be distinguished now, where the roaring of a cascade would have been sunk and lost. I never suspected, till the newspapers informed me of it, a few days since, that the barbarous uproar had reached Great Queen Street. I hope Mrs. Hill was in the country, and shall rejoice to hear that, as I am sure you did not take up the Protestant cudgels upon this hair-brained occasion, so you have not been pulled in pieces as a Papist.

Wm. COWPER.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*July 8, 1780.*

MON AMI.—If you ever take the tip of the Chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb, you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose

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O

than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the lace-makers. I am an eye-witness of their poverty, and do know that hundreds in this little town are upon the point of starving, and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it. I know that the bill by which they would have been so fatally affected is thrown out; but Lord Stormont threatens them with another; and if another like it should pass, they are undone. We lately sent a petition from hence to Lord Dartmouth; I signed it, and am sure the contents are true. The purport of it was to inform him that there are very near one thousand two hundred lace-makers in this beggarly town, the most of whom had reason enough, while the bill was in agitation, to look upon every loaf they bought as the last they should ever be able to earn. I can never think it good policy to incur the certain inconvenience of ruining thirty thousand in order to prevent a remote and possible damage, though to a much greater number. The measure is like a scythe, and the poor lace-makers are the sickly crop that trembles before the edge of it. The prospect of peace with America is like the streak of dawn in their horizon; but this bill is like a black cloud behind it, that threatens their hope of a comfortable day with utter extinction.

I did not perceive till this moment that I had tacked two similes together; a practice which, though warranted by the example of Homer, and allowable in an epic poem, is rather luxuriant and licentious in a letter: lest I should add another, I conclude.

W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 11, 1780.*

I HAVE no oracular responses to make you upon the subject of gardening, while I know that you have both Miller and Mawe<sup>1</sup> in your possession; to them I refer you, but especially to the latter, because it will be little or no trouble to consult him. I have heard that if the first crop of roses are cut off as fast as the buds appear, a second will be produced in autumn. I do not know it to be true; but the fact is easily ascertained, and I recommend it to Miss Shuttleworth<sup>2</sup> to make the experiment with her scissors.

I account myself sufficiently commended for my Latin exercise by the number of translations it has undergone. That which you distinguished in the margin by the word ‘better,’ was the production of a friend; and, except that for a modest reason he omitted the third couplet, I think it is a good one. To finish the group, I have translated it myself; and though I would not wish you to give it to the world, for more reasons than one, especially lest some French hero should call me to an account for it, I add it on the other side. An author ought to be the best judge of his own meaning; and, whether I have succeeded or not, I cannot but wish that where a translator is wanted, the writer was always to be his own.

<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Gardener*, by Thomas Mawe, gardener to the Duke of Leeds.

<sup>2</sup> The Rev. W. Unwin’s sister-in-law.

False, cruel, disappointed, stung to the heart,  
 France quits the warrior's for the assassin's part ;  
 To dirty hands, a dirty bribe conveys,  
 Bids the low street and lofty palace blaze.  
 Her sons too weak to vanquish us alone,  
 She hires the worst and basest of our own.  
 Kneel, France ! a suppliant conquers us with ease ;  
 We always spare a coward on his knees.

I have often wondered that Dryden's illustrious epigram<sup>1</sup> on Milton (in my mind the second best that ever was made) has never been translated into Latin, for the admiration of the learned in other countries. I have at last presumed to venture upon the task myself. The great closeness of the original, which is equal in that respect to the most compact Latin I ever saw, made it extremely difficult.

'Tres, tria, sed longe distantia secula, Vates  
 Ostentant, tribus e gentibus, eximios.  
 Graecia sublimem, cum maiestate disertum  
 Roma talit, felix Anglia utrisque parem.  
 Partibus ex binis Natura exhausta, coacta est  
 Tertius ut fieret, consociare Duos.'

I have not one bright thought upon the chancellor's recovery ; nor can I strike off so much as one sparkling atom from that brilliant subject. It is - not when I will, nor upon what I will, but as a thought happens to occur to me ; and then I versify, whether I will or not.

I never write but for my amusement ; and what I write is sure to answer that end, if it answers no other. If, besides this purpose, the more desirable one of entertaining you be effected, I then receive double fruit of my labour, and consider this produce

<sup>1</sup> 'Three poets in three distant ages born,' &c.

of it as a second crop, the more valuable, because less expected. But when I have once remitted a composition to you, I have done with it. It is pretty certain that I shall never read it or think of it again. From that moment I have constituted you sole judge of its accomplishments, if it has any, and of its defects, which it is sure to have.

For this reason I decline answering the question with which you concluded your last, and cannot persuade myself to enter into a critical examen of the two<sup>1</sup> pieces upon Lord Mansfield's loss, either with respect to their intrinsic or comparative merit; and indeed after having rather discouraged that use of them which you had designed, there is no occasion for it.

I understand, though I have not seen it, that the author of *Thelyphthora* establishes many of his premises upon his own peculiar interpretation of the original Hebrew. I am therefore absolutely incompetent to decide the question whether he has Scripture on his side or not, and have no more curiosity to see his book than I should have if it were written in that language. If I had a wife of whom I was weary, and wished to be indulged with the liberty of taking another, I would certainly read it, and study it too. I should be encouraged in this undertaking by a hope that passion, prejudice, and appetite combining together with the author's ingenuity to impose upon me, might succeed, and release me from the rusty and old-fashioned bonds of fidelity, friendship, and love. But I have no

<sup>1</sup> For the two poems 'On the Burning of Lord Mansfield's Library, together with his mss. by the Mob, in the month of June 1780' see Globe Edition, page 167.

interest in the question, at least no other interest than that of every man who wishes well to his country, and would be sorry to see the honest and faithful English husband converted into a Turkish stallion, and the amiable character of the English wife, the most amiable in the world, degraded into the sordid and base condition of a brood<sup>1</sup> mare.

Your mother's love with mine to all the family.

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 12, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Such nights as I frequently spend are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me, above all things, to the business of writing. Yet with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again.

We are both obliged to you for a sight of Mr. Madan's letter. The friendly and obliging manner of it will much enhance the difficulty of answering it. I think I can see plainly that though he does not hope for your applause, he would gladly

<sup>1</sup> Cowper has 'breed.'

escape your censure. He seems to approach you smoothly and softly, and to take you gently by the hand, as if he bespoke your lenity, and entreated you at least to spare him. You have such skill in the management of your pen, that I doubt not you will be able to send him a balmy reproof that shall give him no reason to complain of a broken head.

—How delusive is the wildest speculation when pursued with eagerness, and nourished with such arguments as the perverted ingenuity of such a mind as his can easily furnish!—Judgment falls asleep upon the bench, while Imagination, like a smug, pert counsellor, stands chattering at the bar, and with a deal of fine-spun, enchanting sophistry carries all before him.

If I had strength of mind, I have not strength of body for the task which, you say, some would impose upon me. I cannot bear much thinking. The meshes of that fine network, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture.—No—I must needs refer it again to you.

My enigma will probably find you out, and you will find out my enigma at some future time. I am not in a humour to transcribe it now. Indeed I wonder that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of

the mournful attendants into laughter. But the mind long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it were but a kitten playing with her tail.

You would believe, though I did not say it at the end of every letter, that we remember you and Mrs. Newton with the same affection as ever; but I would not therefore excuse myself from writing what it gives you pleasure to read. I have often wished indeed, when writing to an ordinary correspondent, for the revival of the Roman custom—*salutem* at top, and *vale* at bottom. But as the French have taught all Europe to enter a room and to leave it with a most ceremonious bow, so they have taught us to begin and conclude our letters in the same manner. However I can say to you, *sans cérémonie*, Adieu, *mon ami*!

W.M. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER, PARK STREET, GROSVENOR  
SQUARE

*July 20, 1780.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—Mr. Newton having desired me to be of the party, I am come to meet him. You see me sixteen years older, at the least, than when I saw you last; but the effects of time seem to have taken place rather on the outside of my head than within it. What was brown is become grey, but what was foolish remains foolish still. Green fruit must rot before it ripens if the season is such as to afford it nothing but cold winds, and dark clouds that intercept every ray of sunshine.

My days steal away silently, and march on (as poor mad King Lear would have made his soldiers march) as if they were shod with felt; not so silently but that I hear them; yet were it not that I am always listening to their flight, having no infirmity that I had not when I was much younger, I should deceive myself with an imagination that I am still young.

I am fond of writing as an amusement, but do not always find it one. Being rather scantily furnished with subjects that are good for any thing, and corresponding only with those who have no relish for such as are good for nothing, I often find myself reduced to the necessity, the disagreeable necessity, of writing about myself. This does not mend the matter much; for though in a description of my own condition I discover abundant materials to employ my pen upon, yet as the task is not very agreeable to me, so I am sufficiently aware that it is likely to prove irksome to others. A painter who should confine himself in the exercise of his art to the drawing of his own picture, must be a wonderful coxcomb, if he did not soon grow sick of his occupation; and be peculiarly fortunate, if he did not make others as sick as himself.

Remote as your dwelling is from the late scene of riot and confusion, I hope that though you could not but hear the report, you heard no more, and that the roarings of the mad multitude did not reach you. That was a day of terror to the innocent, and the present is a day of still greater terror to the guilty. The law was for a few moments like an arrow in the quiver, seemed to be of no use, and did no execution; now it is an arrow upon

the string, and many, who despised it lately, are trembling as they stand before the point of it.

I have talked more already than I have formerly done in three visits:—you remember my taciturnity, never to be forgotten by those who knew me. Not to depart entirely from what might be, for aught I know, the most shining part of my character, I here shut my mouth, make my bow, and return to Olney.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 27, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As two men sit silent, after having exhausted all their topics of conversation, one says, ‘It is very fine weather’; and the other says, ‘Yes’;—one blows his nose, and the other rubs his eyebrows (by the way, this is very much in Homer’s manner); such seems to be the case between you and me. After a silence of some days, I wrote you a long something, that (I suppose) was nothing to the purpose, because it has not afforded you materials for an answer. Nevertheless, as it often happens in the case above-stated, one of the distressed parties, being deeply sensible of the awkwardness of a dumb duet, breaks silence again, and resolves to speak, though he has nothing to say. So it fares with me; I am with you again in the form of an epistle, though considering my present emptiness, I have reason to fear that your only joy upon the occasion will be, that it is conveyed to you in a frank.

When I began, I expected no interruption. But if I had expected interruptions without end, I should

have been less disappointed. First came the barber;<sup>1</sup> who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it. Then came Olney bridge,—not into the house, but into the conversation. The cause relating to it was tried on Tuesday at Buckingham. The judge directed the jury to find a verdict favourable to Olney. The jury consisted of one knave and eleven fools. The last-mentioned followed the afore-mentioned, as sheep follow a bell-wether, and decided in direct opposition to the said judge. Then a flaw was discovered in the indictment. The indictment was quashed, and an order made for a new trial. The new trial will be in the King's Bench, where said knave and said fools will have nothing to do with it. So the men of Olney fling up their caps, and assure themselves of a complete victory. A victory will save me and your mother many shillings, perhaps some pounds, which, except that it has afforded me a subject to write upon, was the only reason why I have said so much about it. I know you take an interest in all that concerns us, and will consequently rejoice with us in the prospect of an event in which we are concerned so nearly.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

[Then follow the Riddle, ‘I am just two and two,’ and the poem ‘Love Abused’—What is there in the vale of life ?]

I will say of that book what I never said, and what no man ought to say of any other, that I could answer it without reading it, deriving all my arguments from principles of mere humanity, fidelity,

<sup>1</sup> William Wilson.

and domestic expediency. My respects with your mother's love attend yourself and the ladies. The children are never forgot.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

My franks are out.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 30, 1780.*

MY DEAR SIR,—You may think, perhaps, that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin in the way of poetical export than I do with you, and I believe you have reason: the truth is this—If I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a Privy Councillor, or a Chief Justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton; that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of an incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton. This has been one reason why I have so long delayed the riddle. But lest I should seem to set a value upon it that I do not, by making it an object of still further inquiry, here it comes.

I am just two and two, I am warm, I am cold,  
And the parent of numbers that cannot be told;  
I am lawful, unlawful—a duty, a fault;  
I am often sold dear, good for nothing when bought,  
An extraordinary boon, and a matter of course,  
And yielded with pleasure—when taken by force.<sup>1</sup>

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*August 6, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You like to hear from me: this is a very good reason why I should write. But I have nothing to say: this seems equally a good reason why I should not. Yet if you had alighted from your horse at our door this morning, and at this present writing, being five o'clock in the afternoon, had found occasion to say to me—‘Mr. Cowper, you have not spoke since I came in; have you resolved never to speak again?’ it would be but a poor reply if, in answer to the summons, I should plead inability as my best and only excuse. And this by the way suggests to me a seasonable piece of instruction, and reminds me of what I am very apt to forget when I have any epistolary business in hand, that a letter may be written upon anything or nothing just as that anything or nothing happens to occur. A man that has a journey before him

<sup>1</sup> The following reply to this riddle appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1806:—

‘A riddle by Cowper  
Made me swear like a trooper,  
But my anger, alas! was in vain;  
For remembering the bliss  
Of beauty's soft kiss,  
I now long for such riddles again.’

twenty miles in length, which he is to perform on foot, will not hesitate and doubt whether he shall set out or not, because he does not readily conceive how he shall ever reach the end of it: for he knows that by the simple operation of moving one foot forward first, and then the other, he shall be sure to accomplish it. So it is in the present case, and so it is in every similar case. A letter is written as a conversation is maintained, or a journey performed; not by preconcerted or premeditated means, a new contrivance, or an invention never heard of before—but merely by maintaining a progress, and resolving as a postilion does, having once set out, never to stop till we reach the appointed end. If a man may talk without thinking, why may he not write upon the same terms? A grave gentleman of the last century, a tie-wig, square-toe, Steinkirk figure, would say, ‘My good sir, a man has no right to do either.’ But it is to be hoped that the present century has nothing to do with the mouldy opinions of the last; and so, good Sir Launcelot, or Sir Paul, or whatever be your name, step into your picture-frame again, and look as if you thought for another century, and leave us moderns in the meantime to think when we can, and to write whether we can or not, else we might as well be dead as you are.

When we look back upon our forefathers, we seem to look back upon the people of another nation, almost upon creatures of another species. Their vast rambling mansions, spacious halls, and painted casements, the gothic porch smothered with honeysuckles, their little gardens and high walls, their box-edgings, balls of holly, and yew-tree statues, are become so entirely unfashionable now,

that we can hardly believe it possible that a people who resembled us so little in their taste should resemble us in any thing else. But in every thing else, I suppose, they were our counterparts exactly ; and time, that has sewed up the slashed sleeve, and reduced the large trunk-hose to a neat pair of silk stockings, has left human nature just where it found it. The inside of the man at least has undergone no change. His passions, appetites, and aims are just what they ever were. They wear perhaps a handsomer disguise than they did in days of yore, for philosophy and literature will have their effect upon the exterior ; but in every other respect a modern is only an ancient in a different dress.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Aug. 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixed pleasures of the country there. But it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well, you are honourably and usefully employed, and ten times more beneficially to society, than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession ; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found when, lying at full

stretch upon the ruins of an old wall by the seaside, you amused yourself with Tasso's *Jerusalem* and the *Pastor Fido*. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey<sup>1</sup> when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the Bench. Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you who have no gout, and probably never will, when your hour of dismission comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he.—I am, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

Wm. COWPER.

*P.S.* Mr. Madan has not thought proper to favour me with his book; and having no interest in the subject, I have not thought proper to purchase it. Indeed I have no curiosity to read what I am sure must be erroneous before I read it. Truth is worth everything that can be given for it; but a mere display of ingenuity, calculated only to mislead, is worth nothing.

#### 'THE RUNAWAY HARE' LETTER

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 21, 1780.*

THE following occurrence ought not to be passed

<sup>1</sup> A famous lawyer, and a connection of Cowper's. He married Mary, daughter of William Cowper of the Park, near Hertford. Made a peer—Baron Walsingham.

over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table when it ceased. In about five minutes, a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out, and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman<sup>1</sup> to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account. That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last

<sup>1</sup> Brought as a lad by Cowper from St. Albans. He married and settled in the eastern portion of the house occupied by Cowper.

disputed between himself and Puss;—she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshort;<sup>1</sup> a little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard,<sup>2</sup> adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tanpits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket, to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the words of Terence a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*  
—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER, PARK STREET, GROSVENOR  
SQUARE

August 31, 1780.

MY DEAR COUSIN,—I am obliged to you for your

<sup>1</sup> An inn on the Lavendon road, formerly a pest-house. There is a footpath from Midland Road, Olney, to the spot.

<sup>2</sup> Close to the Independent meeting-house.

long letter, which did not seem so; and for your short one, which was more than I had any reason to expect. Short as it was, it conveyed to me two interesting articles of intelligence: An account of your recovering from a fever, and of Lady Cowper's death. The latter was, I suppose, to be expected; for by what remembrance I have of her ladyship, who was never much acquainted with her, she had reached those years that are always found upon the borders of another world. As for you, your time of life is comparatively of a youthful date. You may think of death as much as you please (you cannot think of it too much), but I hope you will live to think of it many years.

It costs me not much difficulty to suppose that my friends who were already grown old when I saw them last, are old still; but it costs me a good deal sometimes to think of those who were at that time young, as being older than they were. Not having been an eye-witness of the change that time has made in them, and my former idea of them not being corrected by observation, it remains the same; my memory presents me with this image unimpaired, and while it retains the resemblance of what they were, forgets that by this time the picture may have lost much of its likeness, through the alteration that succeeding years have made in the original. I know not what impressions Time may have made upon your person; for while his claws (as our grannams called them) strike deep furrows in some faces, he seems to sheath them with much tenderness, as if fearful of doing injury, to others. But though an enemy to the person, he is a friend to the mind, and you have found him so.

Though even in this respect his treatment of us depends upon what he meets with at our hands ; if we use him well, and listen to his admonitions, he is a friend indeed, but otherwise the worst of enemies, who takes from us daily something that we valued, and gives us nothing better in its stead. It is well with them who, like you, can stand a tiptoe on the mountain top of human life, look down with pleasure upon the valley they have passed, and sometimes stretch their wings in joyful hope of a happy flight into eternity. Yet a little while, and your hope will be accomplished.

When you can favour me with a little account of your own family, without inconvenience, I shall be glad to receive it ; for though separated from my kindred by little more than half a century of miles, I know as little of their concerns as if oceans and continents were interposed between us.—Yours, my dear cousin,

W. C.

About 1775 there came to Olney from Bedford a schoolmaster named Samuel Teedon ; whom, some years after, we find keeping school in the quaint old building on Olney Market-hill, called 'The Shiel Hall.' He was an eccentric, rather obtrusive, but devout man, much addicted to long words and interminable narratives, which often caused amusement at Orchardside. His extraordinary influence over Cowper's later years will be noticed in ~~after~~ pages.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August.<sup>1</sup>*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If the heat of the weather at London is such as it is here, and you are now employed in writing, you will find it hard work; though a reaper who stoops with his nose within an inch of his sickle all the day, would envy both you and me, and think us but laborious triflers at the best.

Mr. Teedon<sup>2</sup> has received your kind and seasonable donation at two payments; two guineas before your remittance came, and the remainder in Weston Field. We met him there just after we had with difficulty dragged ourselves up that steep and close lane, and were not a little fearful that his honest but rather verbose expressions of gratitude would cost us both a sore throat, our pores standing wide open for the reception of an east wind, which blew rather sharp over the top of the hill.

You have seen Mr. Ashburner, and are consequently in possession of the history of the War-rington pew: it is difficult to say at present what will be the contents of the next chapter, but the conclusion is likely to prove disastrous to Mr. Page, and not more favourable to his friend Mr. Smith; for by the best information we can procure, the latter gentleman having omitted to take the opinion of a vestry (deeming it, I suppose, an idle ceremony, not worthy the attention of a churchwarden acting upon his liberal and enlarged plan), has

<sup>1</sup> Southey gives this letter under date Aug. 1784. This, however, seems to be the place for it.

<sup>2</sup> His famous diary, which covers from 17th Oct. 1791 to 1st Feb. 1794, and contains scores of references to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin—‘The Esq. and Madam,’ is preserved in the Cowper Museum, Olney. It was published in 1901 by the *Unicorn Press*.

mortally offended the principal parishioners, who are determined that he and his principal shall pay for the alteration; a resolution in which, without doubt, they will be warranted by the law. A mind accustomed to reflection may derive a lesson from almost every incident that occurs; and the lesson to be derived from this seems to be, that the peace of that parish is sure to be disturbed, and not likely to be soon restored, that is burthened with a quarrelsome curate and a meddlesome churchwarden.

It is natural before the winter is half over to wish for the return of spring; but we shall wish for the next spring with unusual ardour.

*Cætera desunt.*

The next letter contains further references to the disputes resultant upon the appointment of Mr. Page to the curacy of Olney.

The Thomas Raban mentioned was born in 1784 at Turvey, and apprenticed to a carpenter at Olney in 1748. He became a hearer of the Rev. Moses Browne and the Rev. John Newton, but with the poor creature, ‘Page the parson,’ who succeeded Newton, was perpetually at strife. In 1783 Mr. Raban, who continued to follow his business at Olney, undertook the superintendence of a Non-conformist cause at Yardley-Hastings. He died 18th May 1802, and was buried in Olney churchyard, his funeral sermon being preached on the market-place at Olney by the Rev. Wm. Bull.

Mr. Raban, who is referred to many times in Cowper's Letters and Teedon's Diary, is called on his tombstone the Rev. Thomas Raban, and his life has been written.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*August 31, 1780.*

MY DEAR SIR,—

THE curate<sup>1</sup> and churchwarden,  
And eke exciseman too,  
Have treated poor Tom Raban  
As if he was a Jew.

For they have sent him packing,  
No more in church to work,  
Whatever may be lacking ;  
As if he was a Turk.

Thus carry they the farce on,  
Which is great cause of grief,  
Until that *Page* the parson  
Turn over a *new leaf*.

Thus sings the Muse, and though her fav'rite cue  
Is fiction, yet her song is sometimes true.

At least we are much misinformed if the foregoing tale be not so. Bright Andrew's son is employed as church-carpenter instead of Mr. Raban, and another man has been employed to make sixteen coffins, though if Mr. Raban had not sold him the boards, he could not have found materials to make them with. Besides all this, we have heard a rumour which at present is so confused and full of obscurity as not to be quite intelligible, that a storm is gathering from the Dartmouth quarter, which threatens both Mr. Robinson and Mr. Raban. It is said to have been raised by Maurice Smith, whose quarrel with Mr. Raban is that Mr. Page cannot preach to please him. It is certain that the said churchwarden Smith and Tolson the exciseman did

<sup>1</sup> Curate, Rev. B. Page ; churchwarden, Maurice Smith ; exciseman, Mr. Tolson.

lately repair to the house of Mr. Raban, and there expostulate with him in very angry and unhandsome terms upon that subject, which, being equal in zeal and knowledge, they were well qualified to do. Mr. Sample, who happened to be there, was Mr. Raban's second, and had the courage to address himself to Mr. Smith in these terms: 'I'll tell you what, Mr. Smith, I do really think you are a very meddlesome fellow!' What further passed on the occasion we have not heard, nor perhaps would it be worth relating, only as it serves as a specimen of that disorder and confusion into which everything has been thrown in this parish by Mr. Browne's two unhappy appointments.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 3, 1780.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad you are so provident, and that, while you are yet young, you have furnished yourself with the means of comfort in old age. Your crutch and your pipe may be of use to you (and may they be so) should your years be extended to an antediluvian date; and for your present accommodation, you seem to want nothing but a clerk called Snuffle, and a sexton of the name of Skeleton, to make your ministerial equipage complete.

I think I have read as much of the first volume of the *Biographia*<sup>1</sup> as I shall ever read. I find it very amusing; more so perhaps than it would have been had they sifted their characters with more exactness,

<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Britannica* of Dr. Andrew Kippis. Only five folio vols. were finished (1778-93).

and admitted none but those who had in some way or other entitled themselves to immortality, by deserving well of the public. Such a compilation would perhaps have been more judicious, though I confess it would have afforded less variety. The priests and the monks of earlier, and the doctors of later days, who have signalised themselves by nothing but a controversial pamphlet, long since thrown by, and never to be perused again, might have been forgotten, without injury or loss to the national character for learning or genius. This observation suggested to me the following lines, which may serve to illustrate my meaning, and at the same time to give my criticism a sprightlier air :—

Oh fond attempt, to give a deathless lot  
To names ignoble, born to be forgot !  
In vain, recorded in historic page,  
They court the notice of a future age ;  
Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land  
Drop one by one, from Fame's neglecting hand ;  
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,  
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.  
So when a child (as playful children use)  
Has burnt to cinder a stale last year's news,  
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire,  
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,  
There goes the parson—O illustrious spark !  
And there—scarce less illustrious—goes the clerk !

Virgil admits none but worthies into the Elysian Fields; I cannot recollect the lines in which he describes them all, but these in particular I well remember :—

‘ Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo,  
Inventas aut qui vitam excoluere per artes.’

A chaste and scrupulous conduct like his would

well become the writer of national biography. But enough of this. I am called upon by a different subject. Mr. Cawthorne writes word that there is a small piece of land belonging to the estate in Ely, so bad that it will never pay the expense of draining. He advises your mother therefore to have it sold, which with your consent she is willing to do, and to remit you half the price of it.

Our respects attend Miss Shuttleworth, with many thanks for her intended present. Some purses derive all their value from their contents, but these will have an intrinsic value of their own; and though mine should be often empty, which is not an improbable supposition, I shall still esteem it highly on its own account.

I must answer your questions about plums and pears in my next. Our joint love and affectionate remembrances attend all the family.—Yours,

W. C.

*P.S.*—If you could meet with a second-hand Virgil, ditto Homer, both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, together with a Clavis, for I have no *Lexicon*, and all tolerably cheap, I shall be obliged to you if you will make the purchase.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 7, 1780.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As many gentlemen as there are in the world who have children, and heads capable of reflecting on the important subject of their education, so many opinions there are about it; many of them just and sensible, though almost all differing from each other. With respect to the

education of boys, I think they are generally made to draw in Latin and Greek trammels too soon. It is pleasing, no doubt, to a parent, to see his child already in some sort a proficient in those languages, at an age when most others are entirely ignorant of them; but hence it often happens, that a boy who could construe a fable in *Æsop* at six or seven years of age, having exhausted his little stock of attention and diligence in making that notable acquisition, grows weary of his task, conceives a dislike for study, and perhaps makes but a very indifferent progress afterwards. The mind and the body have in this respect a striking resemblance of each other. In childhood they are both nimble, but not strong; they can skip and frisk about with wonderful agility, but hard labour spoils them both. In maturer years they become less active, but more vigorous, more capable of a fixed application, and can make themselves sport with that which a little earlier would have affected them with intolerable fatigue. I should recommend it to you therefore (but, after all, you must judge for yourself) to allot the two next years of little John's scholarship to writing and arithmetic, together with which, for variety's sake, and because it is capable of being formed into an amusement, I would mingle geography, a science (which, if not attended to betimes, is seldom made an object of much consideration) essentially necessary to the accomplishment of a gentleman, yet (as I know by sad experience) imperfectly, if at all, inculcated in the schools. Lord Spencer's son, when he was four years of age, knew the situation of every kingdom, country, city, river, and remarkable mountain in the world. For this attainment, which

I suppose his father had never made, he was indebted to a plaything ; having been accustomed to amuse himself with those maps which are cut into several compartments so as to be thrown into a heap of confusion, that they may be put together again with an exact coincidence of all their angles and bearings, so as to form a perfect whole.

If he begins Latin and Greek at eight, or even at nine years of age, it is surely soon enough. Seven years, the usual allowance for those acquisitions, are more than sufficient for the purpose, especially with his readiness in learning, for you would hardly wish to have him qualified for the university before fifteen, a period, in my mind, much too early for it, and when he could hardly be trusted there without the utmost danger to his morals. Upon the whole, you will perceive that in my judgment the difficulty, as well as the wisdom, consists more in bridling in, and keeping back, a boy of his parts, than in pushing him forward. If, therefore, at the end of the two next years, instead of putting a grammar into his hand, you should allow him to amuse himself with some agreeable writers upon the subject of natural philosophy for another year, I think it would answer well. There is a book called *Cosmotheoria Puerilis*, there are Derham's<sup>1</sup> *Physico-*, and *Astro-Theology*, together with several others, in the same manner, very intelligible even to a child, and full of useful instruction.

Plums and pears in my next.—Your mother's love and mine attend you all.      Wm. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> William Derham (1657-1735), Divine Author of *Physico-Theology, or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from his Works of Creation* (1713), and *Astro-Theology, or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from a Survey of the Heavens* (1715).

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Sept. 17, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,— You desire my further thoughts on the subject of education. I send you such as had for the most part occurred to me when I wrote last, but could not be comprised in a single letter. They are indeed on a different branch of this interesting theme, but not less important than the former.

I think it your happiness, and wish you to think it so yourself, that you are in every respect qualified for the task of instructing your son, and preparing him for the university, without committing him to the care of a stranger. In my judgment, a domestic education deserves the preference to a public one on a hundred accounts, which I have neither time nor room to mention. I shall only touch upon two or three that I cannot but consider as having a right to your most earnest attention.

In a public school, or indeed in any school, his morals are sure to be but little attended to, and his religion not at all. If he can catch the love of virtue from the fine things that are spoken of it in the classics, and the love of holiness from a customary attendance upon such preaching as he is likely to hear, it will be well; but I am sure you have had too many opportunities to observe the inefficacy of such means to expect any such advantage from them. In the meantime, the more powerful influence of bad example, and perhaps bad company, will continually counterwork these only preservatives he can meet with, and may possibly send him home to you, at the end of five or six years, such as you

will be sorry to see him. You escaped indeed the contagion yourself; but a few instances of happy exemption from a general malady are no sufficient warrant to conclude that it is therefore not infectious, or may be encountered without danger.

You have seen too much of the world, and are a man of too much reflection, not to have observed that in proportion as the sons of a family approach to years of maturity, they lose a sense of obligation to their parents, and seem at last almost divested of that tender affection which the nearest of all relations seems to demand from them. I have often observed it myself, and have always thought I could sufficiently account for it, without laying all the blame upon the children. While they continue in their parents' house, they are every day obliged, and every day reminded how much it is their interest, as well as duty, to be obliging and affectionate in return. But at eight or nine years of age the boy goes to school. From that moment he becomes a stranger in his father's house. The course of parental kindness is intercepted. The smiles of his mother, the tender admonitions, and the solicitous care of both his parents, are no longer before his eyes; year after year he feels himself more and more detached from them, till at last he is so effectually weaned from the connection as to find himself happier anywhere than in their company.

I should have been glad of a frank for this letter, for I have said but little of what I could say upon the subject, and perhaps I may not be able to catch it by the end again. If I can, I shall add to it hereafter.

The land in question consists of eighteen acres,

is fit only to be digged up for turf. Your mother thanks you for your readiness to join in the sale of it, and will write to Mr. Cawthorne to inquire whether he thinks it will be worth while to dispose of it, considering the expense of the title-deed.

The Breda is the best late apricot, and the Empress or *Imperatrice* plum is that which your mother principally recommends. It turns to a fine dried sweetmeat upon the tree, but must not be gathered sooner.—Yours,

W. C.

I thank you for the offer to lend me the books I mentioned, but borrowing will not serve my purpose.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Oct. 5, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Now for the sequel. You have anticipated one of my arguments in favour of a private education, therefore I need say but little about it. The folly of supposing that the mother-tongue, in some respects the most difficult of all tongues, may be acquired without a teacher, is predominant in all the public schools that I have ever heard of. To pronounce it well, to speak and to write it with fluency and elegance, are no easy attainments; not one in fifty of those who pass through Westminster and Eton, arrive at any remarkable proficiency in these accomplishments; and they that do are more indebted to their own study and application for it, than to any instruction received there. In general, there is nothing so pedantic as the style of a schoolboy, if he aims at any style at all; and if he does not, he is of course inelegant, and perhaps ungrammatical. A defect,

no doubt, in great measure owing to the want of cultivation; for the same lad that is often commended for his Latin frequently would deserve to be whipped for his English, if the fault were not more his master's than his own. I know not where this evil is so likely to be prevented as at home,—supposing always, nevertheless (which is the case in your instance), that the boy's parents, and their acquaintance, are persons of elegance and taste themselves. For to converse with those who converse with propriety, and to be directed to such authors as have refined and improved the language by their productions, are advantages which he cannot elsewhere enjoy in an equal degree. And though it requires some time to regulate the taste, and fix the judgment, and these effects must be gradually wrought even upon the best understanding, yet I suppose much less time will be necessary for the purpose than could at first be imagined, because the opportunities of improvement are continual.

I promised to say little on this topic, and I have said so much, that if I had not a frank I must burn my letter and begin again.

A public education is often recommended as the most effectual remedy for that bashful and awkward constraint, so epidemical among the youth of our country. But I verily believe that instead of being a cure, it is often the cause of it. For seven or eight years of his life, the boy has hardly seen or conversed with a man, or a woman, except the maids at his boarding house. A gentleman or a lady are consequently such novelties to him, that he is perfectly at a loss to know what sort of

behaviour he should preserve before him. He plays with his buttons, or the strings of his hat, he blows his nose, and hangs down his head, is conscious of his own deficiency to a degree that makes him quite unhappy, and trembles lest any one should speak to him, because that would quite overwhelm him. Is not all this miserable shyness evidently the effect of his education? To me it appears to be so. If he saw good company every day, he would never be terrified at the sight of it, and a room full of ladies and gentlemen would alarm him no more than the chairs they sit on. Such is the effect of custom.

I need add nothing further on this subject, because I believe little John is as likely to be exempted from this weakness as most young gentlemen we shall meet with. He seems to have his father's spirit in this respect, in whom I could never discern the least trace of bashfulness, though I have often heard him complain of it. Under your management, and the influence of your example, I think he can hardly fail to escape it. If he does, he escapes that which makes many a man uncomfortable for life; and has ruined not a few, by forcing them into mean and dishonourable company, where only they could be free and cheerful.

Connections formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are, whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendships, though warm enough in their commencement,

surprisingly liable to extinction ; and of seven or eight, whom I had selected for intimates out of about three hundred, in ten years time not one was left me. The truth is, that there may be, and often is, an attachment of one boy to another, that looks very like a friendship ; and while they are in circumstances that enable them mutually to oblige and to assist each other, promises well, and bids fair to be lasting. But they are no sooner separated from each other, by entering into the world at large, than other connections, and new employments, in which they no longer share together, efface the remembrance of what passed in earlier days, and they become strangers to each other for ever. Add to this, that the *man* frequently differs so much from the *boy*—his principles, manners, temper, and conduct undergo so great an alteration—that we no longer recognise in him our old playfellow, but find him utterly unworthy and unfit for the place he once held in our affections.

To close this article, as I did the last, by applying myself immediately to the present concern—little John is happily placed above all occasion for dependence upon such precarious hopes, and need not be sent to school in quest of some great man in embryo, who may possibly make his fortune.

I have just left myself room to return Miss Shuttleworth our very sincere thanks for our respective purses, and to assure her that we shall value as we ought her obliging present, and wear them to the last thread.

Your mother sends her love, and hopes you will remember the franks. Mine with hers to all at Stock.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON<sup>1</sup>*Oct. 5, 1780.*

DEAR MADAM,—When a lady speaks it is not civil to make her wait a week for an answer.—I received your letter within this hour, and, foreseeing that the garden will engross much of my time for some days to come, have seized the present opportunity to acknowledge it. I congratulate you on Mr. Newton's safe arrival at Ramsgate, making no doubt but that he reached the place without difficulty or danger, the road thither from Canterbury being so good as to afford room for neither. He has now a view of the element, with which he was once so familiar, but which I think he has not seen for many years. The sight of his old acquaintance will revive in his mind a pleasing recollection of past deliverances, and when he looks at him from the beach, he may say—‘You have formerly given me trouble enough, but I have cast anchor now where your billows can never reach me.’—It is happy for him that he can say so.

Mrs. Unwin returns you many thanks for your anxiety on her account. Her health is considerably mended upon the whole, so as to afford us a hope that it will be established.

Our love attends you.—Yours, dear madam,  
W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nor. 9, 1780.*

I WROTE the following last summer. The tragical occasion of it really happened at the next house to ours. I am glad when I can find a subject to work

<sup>1</sup> For letter from Newton to Cowper (Sept. 30, 1780) see Bull's *Letters by the Rev. John Newton*. Newton signs himself ‘Your most affectionate Achates.’

upon ; a lapidary I suppose accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone ; but it is my amusement, and if after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains.

## ON A GOLDFINCH STARVED TO DEATH IN HIS CAGE.

Time was, etc.

I shall charge you a halfpenny a-piece for every copy I send you, the short as well as the long. This is a sort of afterclap you little expected, but I cannot possibly afford them at a cheaper rate. If this method of raising money had occurred to me sooner, I should have made the bargain sooner ; but am glad I have hit upon it at last. It will be a considerable encouragement to my muse, and act as a powerful stimulus to my industry. If the American war should last much longer, I may be obliged to raise my price ; but this I shall not do without a real occasion for it :—it depends much upon Lord North's pretty conduct in the article of supplies. If he imposes an additional tax on any thing that I deal in, the necessity of this measure, on my part, will be so apparent, that I dare say you will not dispute it.

Your mother desires me to add her love to mine, which waits on you all as usual. She is much pleased with your desire to hear from her, but having such an industrious secretary in me, she thought it the less necessary. She will use her own hand, however, when her nerves, which are seldom well strung, and which this turbulent weather particularly discomposes, will give her leave.—Yours, my dear friend,

Wm. COWPER.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Probably Nov. or Dec. 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you much for your letter, which, without obliging me to travel to Wargrave at a time of year when journeying is not very agreeable, has introduced me in the most commodious manner to a perfect acquaintance with your neat little garden, your old cottage, and above all with your most prudent and sagacious landlady. As much as I admire her, I admire much more the philosophical temper with which you seem to treat her: for I know few characters more provoking, to me at least, than the selfish, who are never honest; especially if while they determine to pick your pocket, they have not ingenuity enough to conceal their purpose. But you are perfectly in the right, and act just as I would endeavour to do on the same occasion. You sacrifice everything to a retreat you admire; and, if the natural indolence of my disposition did not forsake me, so would I.

You might as well apologise for sending me forty pounds as for writing about yourself. Of the two ingredients I hardly know which made your letter the most agreeable—(observe, I do not say the most acceptable). The draft indeed was welcome; but though it was so, yet it did not make me laugh. I laughed heartily at the account you gave of yourself and your landlady, Dame Saveall, whose picture you have drawn, though not with a flattering hand, yet I dare say with a strong resemblance. As to you, I have never seen so much of you since I was in London, where you and I so often have made ourselves merry with each other's humour, yet never

gave each other a moment's pain by doing so. We are both humourists, and it is well for your wife and my Mrs. Unwin that they have alike found out the way to deal with us.

More thanks to Mrs. Hill for her intentions. She has the true enthusiasm of a gardener, and therefore, I can pity her under her disappointment, having so large a share of that commodity myself.

I am informed that Lady C. has left me an annuity of twenty pounds. I mention it merely because, as you do not, I thought you might not have heard it.  
—Yours, my dear Sir, affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

*Dec. 10, 1780.*

IT is well for me that as my intelligencer with respect to Lady Cowper's legacy proved to be mistaken, the substantial part of his information is however authenticated, and the money not lost though it comes from a different mine.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 10, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sorry that the bookseller shuffles off the trouble of package upon anybody that belongs to you. I think I could cast him upon this point in an action upon the case, grounded upon the terms of his own undertaking. He engages to serve country customers. Ergo, as it would be unreasonable to expect that when a country gentleman wants a book, he should order his chaise, and bid the man drive to Exeter Change; and as it is not probable that the book would find the way to

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him of itself, though it were the wisest that ever was written, I should suppose the law would compel him. For I recollect it is a maxim of good authority in the courts that there is no right without a remedy. And if another, or a third person, should not be suffered to interpose between my right and the remedy the law gives me, where the right is invaded, much less, I apprehend, shall the man himself, who of his own mere motion gives me that right, be suffered to do it.

I never made so long an argument upon a law case before. I ask your pardon for doing it now. You have but little need of such entertainment.—Yours affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 21, 1780.

I THANK you for your anecdote of Judge Carpenter. If it really happened, it is one of the best stories I ever heard; and if not, it has at least the merit of being *ben trovato*. We both very sincerely laughed at it, and think the whole Livery of London must have done the same; though I have known some persons whose faces, as if they had been cast in a mould, could never be provoked to the least alteration of a single feature; so that you might as well relate a good story to a barber's block.

Non equidem invideo, miror magis.

Your sentiments with respect to me are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer

gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore at this time I suppress it. It is better on every account that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not, if I would, so neither would I, if I could, deprive them of it.

I annex a long thought in verse for your perusal. It was produced about last midsummer, but I never could prevail with myself till now to transcribe it. You have bestowed some commendations on a certain poem now in the press, and they, I suppose, have at least animated me to the task. If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry (and why not?), then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipped again.

It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called the 'Progress of Error.' That will be succeeded by another, in due time, called 'Truth.' Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with a curb.<sup>1</sup> He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please.—Yours,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 24, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sensibly mortified at finding myself obliged to disappoint you; but, though I have had many thoughts upon the subjects you propose to my consideration, I have had none that have been favourable to the undertaking. I applaud your purpose for the sake of the principle from which it springs, but I look upon the evils you mean to animadvert upon as too obstinate and inveterate ever to be expelled by the means you mention. The very persons to whom you would address your remonstrance are themselves sufficiently aware of their enormity; years ago, to my knowledge, they were frequently the topics of conversation at polite tables; they have been frequently mentioned in both houses of Parliament, and I suppose there is hardly a member of either who would not immediately assent to the necessity of a reform were it proposed to him in a reasonable way. But there it stops, and there it will for ever stop, till the majority are animated with a zeal in which at present they are deplorably defective. A religious man is

<sup>1</sup> One judges that Newton had taken exception to some of the passages in *Anti-Thelyphthora*.

unfeignedly shocked when he reflects upon the prevalence of such crimes; a moral man must needs be so in a degree, and will affect to be much more so than he is. But how many do you suppose there are among our worthy representatives that come under either of these descriptions? If all were such, yet to new model the police of the country, which must be done, in order to make even unavoidable perjury less frequent, were a task they would hardly undertake on account of the great difficulty that would attend it. Government is too much interested in the consumption of malt liquor to reduce the number of vendors. Such plausible pleas may be offered in defence of travelling on Sundays, especially by the trading part of the world, as the whole bench of Bishops would find it difficult to overrule. And with respect to the violation of oaths, till a certain name is more generally respected than it is at present, however such persons as yourself may be grieved at it, the legislature are never likely to lay it to heart. I do not mean, nor would by any means attempt to discourage you in so laudable an enterprise, but such is the light in which it appears to me that I do not feel the least spark of courage qualifying or prompting me to embark in it myself. An exhortation, therefore, written by me—by hopeless, desponding me—would be flat, insipid, and uninteresting, and disgrace the cause, instead of serving it. If after what I have said, however, you still retain the same sentiments, *Macte esto virtute tua!* there is nobody better qualified than yourself, and may your success prove that I despised of it without a reason.

Your poor sister! she has many good qualities,

and upon some occasions gives proof of a good understanding ; but as some people have no ear for music, so she has none for humour. Well, if she cannot laugh at our jokes, we can, however, at her mistakes, and in this way she makes us ample amends for the disappointment. Mr. Powley is much like herself ; if his wife overlooks the jest, he will never be able to find it. They were neither of them born to write epigrams or ballads, and I ought to be less mortified at the coldness with which they entertain my small sallies in the way of drollery, when I reflect that if Swift himself had had no other judges he would never have found one admirer.

It is indeed, as you observe, incumbent upon Mr. Madan to reply to the reviewer, if he means to maintain his point. But unless he means likewise to expose himself more in a second attempt than he did even in his first, it is still more incumbent upon him to be silent. I reckon myself a competent judge of the argument, so far as the Greek criticisms are in question ; and if I am, a refutation of what his antagonist has advanced against that part of his performance, is (I think) impossible. That impossibility is followed close at the heels by a conclusion not to be avoided. Syllogistically dressed, it stands thus : The Scripture is the only ground on which the doctrine of polygamy can be proved.

But it cannot be proved by Scripture.

*Ergo*.—Not at all.

You desired me, some time since, to send you my twenty-seven answers to ditto number of queries drawn up by the Rev. Mr. Ryland, of Birmingham.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rev. John Ryland, of St. Mary's, Birmingham, who married Rev. Mr. Venn's friend, Miss Hudson. See also letter of 14th Jan. 1781.

I would have done it, if the Review had not made it entirely unnecessary. The gentleman, for whose use in particular I designed them, declined sending them to the querist at my instance; so that, immediately almost after their production, they became waste paper, and I kept no copy of them myself. The questions discovered such marks of almost childish imbecility, that I could not possibly propose to myself the acquisition of any credit by the answers. But as some men, especially weak ones, are apt to suppose themselves irrefragable and invincible in disputation, I replied to them merely to guard the poor gentleman against the pernicious effects of so sad a blunder upon an occasion of such importance.

My respects attend the family, that is to say, my affectionate ones. I heartily wish Mrs. Unwin better spirits. Never be afraid of the multiplication of children; you do not make them yourself, and He that does, knows how to provide for them. Poor bare-breeched Billy, to whom your alms were yesterday so acceptable, has no desponding thoughts upon this subject, though he has now four, and considering his age, and the age of his wife, may possibly have fourteen.—Yours, my dear friend,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 25, 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Weary with rather a long walk in the snow, I am not likely to write a very sprightly letter, or to produce anything that may cheer this gloomy season, unless I have recourse to

my pocket-book, where perhaps I may find something to transcribe—something that was written before the sun had taken leave of our hemisphere, and when I was less fatigued than I am at present.

Happy is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of juridical proceedings. I have heard of common law judgments before now, indeed have been present at the delivery of some, that, according to my poor apprehension, while they paid the utmost respect to the letter of a statute, have departed widely from the spirit of it; and, being governed entirely by the point of law, have left equity, reason, and common sense behind them at an infinite distance. You will judge whether the following report of a case, drawn up by myself, be not a proof and illustration of this satirical assertion.<sup>1</sup>

—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Dec. 1780.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Poetical reports of law cases are not very common, yet it seems to me desirable that they should be so. Many advantages would accrue from such a measure. They would, in the first place, be more commodiously deposited in the memory, just as linen, grocery, or other such matters, when neatly packed, are known to occupy less room, and to lie more conveniently in any trunk, chest, or box to which they may be committed. In the next place, being divested of that infinite circumlocution,

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Report of an adjudged Case, not to be found in any of the Books,’ concludes this letter.

and the endless embarrassment in which they are involved by it, they would become surprisingly intelligible, in comparison with their present obscurity. And lastly, they would by this means be rendered susceptible of musical embellishment, and instead of being quoted in the courts, with that dull monotony, which is so wearisome to by-standers, and frequently lulls even the judges themselves to sleep, might be rehearsed in recitative, which would have an admirable effect in keeping the attention fixed and lively, and could not fail to disperse that heavy atmosphere of sadness and gravity which hangs over the jurisprudence of our country. I remember, many years ago, being informed by a relation of mine, who in his youth had applied himself to the study of the law, that one of his fellow-students, a gentleman of sprightly parts, and very respectable talents of the poetical kind, did actually engage in the prosecution of such a design, for reasons I suppose somewhat similar to, if not the same with those I have now suggested. He began with Coke's *Institutes*, a book so rugged in its style that an attempt to polish it seemed an Herculean labour, and not less arduous and difficult, than it would be to give the smoothness of a rabbit's fur to the prickly back of a hedgehog. But he succeeded to admiration, as you will perceive by the following specimen, which is all that my said relation could recollect of the performance.

Tenant in fee  
Simple, is he,  
And need neither quake nor quiver,  
Who hath his lands,  
Free from all demands,  
To him and his heirs for ever.

You have an ear for music, and a taste for verse, which saves me the trouble of pointing out with a critical nicety the advantages of such a version. I proceed, therefore, to what I at first intended, and to transcribe the record of an adjudged case thus managed, to which indeed what I have premised was intended merely as an introduction. W. C.

Nose, plaintiff—Eyes, defendant. *Vide* Plowden, folio 6000.  
Between eyes and nose, etc.

Your mother will be glad to know when you are to be next in town. If you can meet with any person who has a little spare money, we know where it may be bestowed to the very best purpose.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Jan. 14, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I seldom write what may properly be called an answer to a letter, unless to a letter that requires an answer; but on the present occasion, being conscious that I have not spirits to enable me to make excursions on the wings of invention, I purpose to confine myself pretty much to the subject of yours. Which prudent procedure will serve the double purpose of relieving me from the toil of pumping in vain, and of convincing you that you cannot do a worse thing than to deprive me of your letters upon an apprehension that they can afford me neither profit nor amusement.

Impressions made upon the mind in our early days are seldom entirely effaced. This is an old observation, but I shall engrave a new one upon it. Though you have a perfect recollection of John

Cross's pious and wise remark, I am sadly afraid that you have never made a practical use of it, which I the more wonder at, because his unexpected good fortune in the instance you allude to amounts almost to a proof of the great utility of such a custom. How is it possible, were you but properly careful to keep that part uppermost at the time of rising, that you could be plagued as you are with such a variety of misadventures?—tithes unpaid, dilapidations without end, lawsuits revived, and your curate running away from you for the sake of a pleasanter country. I dare say John Cross was exempted from all these disagreeable occurrences; he had not half your understanding, yet knew how to avoid them all by attending to the main chance in the article you hint at. He presented something more substantial than even a seven-fold shield to the arrows of ill-fortune; and receiving them, if he received them at all, where they could not possibly reach his heart, went through the world insensible of the troubles with which it abounds. He clapped his hand upon you know what, and said to misfortune, Now, madam, I defy you. This you know as well as I; this, therefore, you should practise; and though you cannot, I suppose, boast of such a buttress as he was fenced with, yet, *pro modulo*, and according to your ability, you should make that use of it his example teaches, and the most of a little.

From Mr. Madan's renewed publication, I cannot but infer that he preserves the same conduct as before he published at all. Letters of admonition, dissuasion, and exhortation, he burned unread; and has treated, I suppose, the Review with the same obstinate indifference and contempt. I the rather

think so, because I am firmly persuaded he could not reply to his answerer; though it is possible his case may resemble that of a certain disputant I have heard of, who said upon a like occasion, ‘I am confuted, but not convinced.’

Impregnable, however, as he may be to the attacks of sound reason, backed with all the authority of sound learning, his advocates are not all, it seems, quite so stubborn as himself. Mr. Ryland, of Birmingham,<sup>1</sup> has at last forsaken the standard of polygamy, and betaken himself to the side of Christian decorum and decency again. Mr. Powley, we learn from good authority, has been instrumental in working this conversion, which does him the more honour, as he had by all accounts a very weak, though a very good man to deal with. Men that have no large share of reason themselves, are seldom sensible of the force of it in the hands of another.

I am informed that the reviewer is preparing an answer at large, and that the Bishop of London has likewise undertaken the task. If this be the case, *actum est de Thelyphthorâ*. I hear likewise that the king, having read a part of it, threw it down with indignation, and expressed his regret that there was no law by which such an author could be brought to the punishment he deserves. This is not unlikely, for, by all accounts, he is a moral man, and consequently a chaste husband; that he should view therefore such a proposal with abhorrence is natural enough.

Your mother returns her thanks to Mrs. Unwin for her letter. Our love attends you both, with Miss Shuttleworth and the little ones. The two guineas may be sent with the salmon, for which we thank

<sup>1</sup> See letter of 24 Dec. 1780, p. 251.

you *par avance*. If the lines of your letter could be pushed together they would not fill three sides ; and if mine could be moved to the distance at which yours stand from each other, they would fill four. This, however, is not my reason for concluding, but because I am weary, therefore I add only that I am,  
—Yours as ever,

W.M. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Jan. 21, 1781.

MY DEAR SIR,—I am glad that the *Progress of Error* did not Err in its progress, as I feared it had ; and that it has reached you safe ; and still more pleased that it has met with your approbation ; for if it had not, I should have wished it had miscarried, and have been sorry that the bearer's memory had served him so well upon the occasion. I knew him to be that sort of genius, which, being much busied in making excursions of the imaginary kind, is not always present to its own immediate concerns, much less to those of others ; and having reposed the trust in him, began to regret that I had done so, when it was too late. But I did it to save a frank, and as the affair has turned out, that end was very well answered. This is committed to the hands of a less volatile person, and therefore more to be depended on.

As to the poem called *Truth*, which is already longer than its elder brother, and is yet to be lengthened by the addition of perhaps twenty lines, perhaps more ; I shrink from the thought of transcribing it at present. But as there is no need to be in any hurry about it, I hope that in some rainy season, which the next month will probably bring

with it, when perhaps I may be glad of employment, the undertaking will appear less formidable.

You need not withhold from us any intelligence relating to yourselves, upon an apprehension that Mr. Raban has been beforehand with you upon those subjects, for he came down as costive as if you had fed him with nothing but quinces, and unless we engineered him with question after question, we could get nothing out of him. I have known such travellers in my time, and Mrs. Newton is no stranger to one of them, who keep all their observations and discoveries to themselves, till they are extorted from them by mere dint of examination and cross-examination. He told us indeed that some invisible agent supplied you every Sunday with a coach, which we were pleased with hearing; and this, I think, was the sum total of his information.

We are much concerned for Mr. Barham's loss;<sup>1</sup> but it is well for that gentleman, that those amiable features in his character, which most incline one to sympathise with him, are the very graces and virtues that will strengthen him to bear it with equanimity and patience. People that have neither his light nor experience, will wonder that a disaster which would perhaps have broken their hearts, is not heavy enough to make any abatement in the cheerfulness of his.

Your books came yesterday. I shall not repeat to you what I said to Mrs. Unwin, after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn-out topic, and have actually engaged the favour of

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Barham's death. Joseph Foster Barham was an acquaintance of both Cowper and Newton. He suggested the subjects of some of the Olney hymns.

the reader by saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting.

I suppose you know that Mr. Scott<sup>1</sup> will be in town on Tuesday. He is likely to take possession of the Vicarage at last, with the best grace possible ; at least, if he and Mr. Browne<sup>2</sup> can agree upon the terms. The old gentleman, I find, would be glad to let the house, and abridge the stipend ; in other words, to make a good bargain for himself, and starve his curate.—Yours, my dear friend,

W.M. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

Feb. 3, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is possible that Mrs. Hill may not be herself a sufferer by the late terrible catastrophe in the Islands ; but I should suppose by her correspondence with those parts, she may be connected with some that are. In either case, I

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Scott (1747-1821), the famous commentator and divine, became curate of Weston-Underwood soon after his ordination in 1773, and made the acquaintance of John Newton, whom in 1781 he succeeded as curate of Olney. Cowper revised his book, *The Force of Truth*, published in 1779. He became chaplain at the Lock Hospital in London in 1785. His *Commentary on the Bible* came out in 174 weekly numbers, which began in 1788 and finished in 1792. He died at Aston Sandford, of which parish he was vicar in his later years.

<sup>2</sup> Moses Browne (1704-1787) wrote a tragedy : *Polidus, or Distress'd Love*. In early years he was a constant poetical contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, where he won a prize theological poem. He edited an edition of Walton's *Compleat Angler*, at the suggestion of Dr. Johnson, in 1750. His principal book, however, is entitled *The Works and Rest of Creation*, published in 1752. He was curate to Cowper's great friend Hervey at Collingtree, and in 1753 became non-resident vicar of Olney, where John Newton was his curate from 1764 to 1780. Thomas Scott succeeded him. Finally he became vicar of Sutton, Lincolnshire.—W. P. Courtney, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

condole with her ; for it is reasonable to imagine that since the first tour that Columbus made into the Western world, it never before experienced such a convulsion ; perhaps never since the foundation of the globe. You say the state grows old, and discovers many symptoms of decline. A writer, possessed of a genius for hypothesis, like that of Burnet, might construct a plausible argument to prove that the world itself is in a state of superannuation, if there be such a word. If not, there must be such a one as superannuity. When that just equilibrium that has hitherto supported all things, seems to fail, when the elements burst the chain that has bound them, the wind sweeping away the works of man, and man himself together with his works, and the ocean seeming to overleap the command, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed,' these irregular and prodigious vagaries seem to bespeak a decay, and forebode, perhaps, not a very distant dissolution. This thought has so run away with my attention, that I have left myself no room for the little politics that have only Great Britain for their object. Who knows but that while a thousand, and ten thousand tongues are employed in adjusting the scale of our national concerns, in complaining of new taxes, and funds loaded with a debt of accumulating millions, the consummation of all things may discharge it in a moment, and the scene of all this bustle disappear, as if it had never been ? Charles Fox would say, perhaps, he thought it very unlikely. I question if he could prove even that. I am sure, however, he could not prove it to be impossible.—Yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON, CHARLES SQUARE,  
HOXTON, LONDON

Feb. 4, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We have waited I suppose with equal impatience for a letter. Our last dispatches crossed each other, so that each of us has claimed the posteriority, the epistolary race being always won by him that comes in last. This, however, has not been the only reason of my silence. I have been very busy in my way, and ere long you will see the fruit of my labour. I shall say nothing of it at present, except that *Truth*, though long since finished, must be postponed to this last production, and that the *Progress of Error* itself must not take the lead of it. *Truth* will be seasonable at any time, and though the *Progress of Error* has some connection with the present day, it is not so closely related to the occurrences of it as the new one, which has the name of *Table Talk*. I have almost finished the copy of it which I intend for you, but cannot send it till from that I have transcribed another for myself, the original being written on so many scrips and scraps that it would be very troublesome to range them, and indeed I have no perfect copy of it but the fair one. I have not numbered the lines, but I suspect that it is longer than either of the others. Now I believe I shall hang up my harp for the remainder of the year, and

Since Eighty-one has had so much to do,  
Postpone what yet is left till Eighty-two.

We were much pleased with your Extracts; they were so faithful to the truth, that unless Mr. Madan

has much of that candour he will not allow to others, they will put his friendship for you to a strong trial : and yet so affectionate, that he cannot be displeased without the violation of every thing that deserves the name of friendship. We both long to be informed of the reception they have met with, and take it for granted you will indulge our curiosity when you can. We have been told that the Bishop of London intends an answer to *Thelyphthora*, but I think his Lordship would hardly have put off the publication to so late a day. We have been told likewise that Mr. Ryland is a convert to monogamy, but from some things we have heard since are obliged to doubt it.

Mr. Scott called on us the very day of his return from London. We are glad of his appointment to the curacy, and so I suppose are all, at least all but a very few, whose joy or sorrow on the occasion is of small consequence to any but themselves. And yet I think he will meet with troubles, and if my sagacity does not fail me much, I can see from what quarter they are likely to arise. Instrumentality is generally taken up with some reluctance, and laid down with a great deal more : but where such a man, so well qualified in every respect for the charge assigned him, has the care of a people, there can be no occasion for subordinate assistance. It is not his design to accept of it, and his refusal, I am rather apprehensive, will occasion a murmur somewhere. Even upon your account we are pleased with Mr. Page's departure, as some disagreeables and awkwardnesses would probably have attended your interview. He could not have refused you his pulpit, and yet there is reason to believe that you are the last man in the

kingdom he would have wished to see in it. He has applied, or rather Mr. Warden Smith in his behalf, for the curacy at Ravenstone, but Mr. Chapman<sup>1</sup> has given no definite answer. Mr. Scott, I should suppose, would be sorry to see himself so succeeded. Mr. Dowbiggin's<sup>2</sup> curate, (if I have spelt the strange name aright,) pays addresses to the same lady, and Mr. Jones has been ogling her not a little. But who will be the happy man, conjecture has not yet ventured to surmise.

We wait with some impatience for the issue of Lord George's<sup>3</sup> trial. Somebody, late from London, has brought hither the news that fresh disturbances are expected on the occasion, especially if he should be condemned; but what sort of patriotism is it, or what sort of zeal, that is offended when the laws of the country take their course? We are both pretty well. Mrs. Unwin joins with me in love to yourself and Mrs. Newton.—Yours, my dear sir,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 6, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is high time you should consult your own peace of mind, and not suffer the insatiable demands and unreasonable expectations of other men to be a source of unhappiness to yourself.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Robert Chapman, Vicar of Ravenstone.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Mr. Dowbiggin, Rector of Stoke Goldington.

<sup>3</sup> Lord George Gordon (1751-1793) was the youngest son of Cosmo George Gordon, third Duke of Gordon. He sat in Parliament for Ludgershall, Wiltshire, in 1774, becoming President of the Protestant Association in 1779. To this body Gordon presented a petition against Roman Catholicism to the House of Commons. The famous 'No Popery' riots ensued in 1780, of which Gordon was the leader. He was tried for high treason in 1781, but was acquitted.

You have lived long enough in the world to know that it swarms with people who are always ready to take advantage of the generosity of such men as you ; who say in their hearts, when they meet with such disinterested treatment as every one receives from your hands, ‘Now is the time ;—the man has a gentlemanly regard for his character, he loves peace more than money, and will make any concessions, so that he may but approve himself to his own conscience. Let us squeeze him ; he will yield well ; the more he complies the more we will insist, and make him pay dear for the character he wishes to deserve.’ I cannot doubt but your predecessor’s curate is of this stamp ; his demand wants nothing but a cocked pistol to make it felony, without benefit of clergy.

As to your proposal to the executors, if it does not give contentment, it must be for the reasons above mentioned ; in which case I would recommend it to you by all means, to pay them exactly what they can lawfully demand for glebe and tithe, and not a farthing more, and in return to insist upon every penny you lay out in necessary repairs, and not a farthing less. It is wrong not to deal liberally with persons who themselves act upon liberal and honest principles ; but it is weakness to be the willing dupe of artifice, and to sacrifice one’s own interest for the sake of satisfying the insatiable or unjust.

We are obliged to you for the rugs, a commodity that can never come to such a place as this at an unseasonable time. We have given one to an industrious poor widow with four children, whose sister overheard her shivering in the night, and with some difficulty brought her to confess the next

morning that she was half perished for want of sufficient covering. Her said sister borrowed a rug for her at a neighbour's immediately, which she had used but one night when yours arrived. And I doubt not but we shall meet with others equally indigent, and deserving of your bounty.

I hear this morning (*vidâ toujours*) that Lord George is acquitted. I take it for granted that you was at the trial, for three reasons. First, because you was in town so lately; secondly, because you have a laudable curiosity, that acts as a spur upon your spirits on all such occasions; and thirdly, because you are slender and slim, and take up so little room that you are sure of a place when men of ampler dimensions are necessarily excluded. Tell us all that passed; and if he is indeed acquitted, let us know upon what point his acquittal turned, for at present I am rather at a loss to conceive how he could escape if the law was allowed to take its course, uninterrupted by fear and uncontrolled by a spirit of party.

Much good may your humility do you, as it does so much good to others. You can no where find objects more entitled to your pity, than where your pity seeks them. A man whose vices and irregularities have brought his liberty and life into danger will always be viewed with an eye of compassion by those who understand what human nature is made of. And while we acknowledge the severity of the law to be founded upon principles of necessity and justice, and are glad that there is such a barrier provided for the peace of society, if we consider that the difference between ourselves and the culprit is not of our own making, we shall be, as you are,

tenderly affected with the view of his misery, and not the less so because he has brought it upon himself. I look upon the worst man in Chelmsford gaol with a more favourable eye than upon a certain curate,<sup>1</sup> who claims a servant's wages from one who never was his master.

What goes before was written in the morning. This evening I have read the trial as related in the *General Evening*, and can only add to what I said before, in the words of Horace.

' —— Miror quo pacto judicium illud  
Fugerit.'

I give you joy of your own hair. No doubt you are a considerable gainer in your appearance by being disperiwigged. The best wig is that which most resembles the natural hair; why then should he that has hair enough of his own, have recourse to imitation? I have little doubt, but that if an arm or a leg could have been taken off with as little pain as attends the amputation of a curl or a lock of hair, the natural limb would have been thought less becoming, or less convenient, by some men, than a wooden one, and been disposed of accordingly.

Thanks for the salmon, it was perfectly good, as were the two lobsters; and the two guineas came safe. Having some verses to transcribe, and being rather weary, I add no more, except our love to the whole family, jointly and severally. Having begun my letter with a miserable pen, I was not willing to change it for a better lest my writing should not be all of a piece, but it has worn me and my patience quite out.—Yours ever,

WM. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> See letter of April 2, 1781.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Feb. 15, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad you were pleased with my report of so extraordinary a case. If the thought of versifying the decisions of our courts of justice had struck me, while I had the honour to attend them, it would perhaps have been no difficult matter to have compiled a volume of such amusing and interesting precedents; which, if they wanted the eloquence of the Greek or Roman oratory, would have amply compensated that deficiency by the harmony of rhyme and metre.

Your account of my Uncle and your Mother gave me great pleasure. I have long been afraid to inquire after some in whose welfare I always feel myself interested, lest the question should produce a painful answer. Longevity is the lot of so few, and is so seldom rendered comfortable by the associations of good health and good spirits, that I could not very reasonably suppose either your relations or mine so happy in those respects, as it seems they are. May they continue to enjoy those blessings so long as the date of life shall last. I do not think that in these costermonger days, as I have a notion Falstaff calls them, an antediluvian age is at all a desirable thing; but to live comfortably, while we do live, is a great matter, and comprehends in it everything that can be wished for on this side the curtain that hangs between Time and Eternity.

Farewell my better friend than any I have to boast of either among the lords, or gentlemen of the House of Commons.—Yours ever,

W. C.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 18, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I send you *Table Talk*. It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed.

As to the word you mention, I a little suspected

that you would object to it, though I really thought that a book which cannot be supposed to have been written under a blessing, and that has certainly carried mischief with it into many families, deserved an epithet as harsh as that which I had given it. It is a bargain however that I have made with my lady Muse, never to defend, or stickle for any thing that you object to. So the line may stand if you please thus,

'Abhor'd *Thelyphthora*,' etc.

—you will meet with the obnoxious word again in the copy I send you now, but coupled with a substantive of so filthy a character that I persuade myself you will have no objection to the use of it in such a connection. I am no friend to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the diabolical dictionary, but it happens sometimes that a coarse expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject. I am obliged to you, however, for your opinion; and, though poetry is apt to betray one into a warmth that one is not sensible of in writing prose, shall always desire to be set down by it.

We are glad that so able a writer as Mr. Hill has taken up the cudgels. He is old enough to know how to reason with precision, and young enough to do it with fire and spirit. In conflicting with a disputant like Mr. Madan, I should suppose these two qualifications almost equally necessary. A writer like him, who knows how to get the laugh on his side, would be pretty secure of having the world on his side too, if his adversary had no skill in the use of the same weapon. It is such a merry world

that Truth herself seems to want one of her principal recommendations, unless she will now and then condescend to the prevailing temper of her hearers. But you say you think it will do, and therefore I have no doubt of it.

Mr. Scott<sup>1</sup> told Mr. Wilson<sup>2</sup> yesterday or the day before, that he had again asked Mr. Raban whether or not he intended to continue his speaking, and that Mr. Raban would give him no determinate answer. This I had from Mr. Wilson himself. It will be well if that business ends peaceably. Nothing could be more tenderly cogent than your letter to his colleague, and he, for aught I know, may be properly influenced by it; but it seems plain that either the before-mentioned had not seen it, or that if he had, he had not felt it.—Geary Ball has lost his wife. She was buried on Thursday, having left her friends a comfortable hope of her welfare.

You had been married thirty-one years last Monday. When you married I was eighteen years of age, and had just left Westminster school. At that time I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure, as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent

<sup>1</sup> Rev. T. Scott.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's wigmaker.

in painting a piece of wood that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed*; I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures. Then I learned the truth, and then I lost it; and there ends my history. I would no more than you wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason. He that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey.—Yours, my dear sir, with our joint love,

W. C.

TO MRS. HILL

Feb. 19, 1781.

— DEAR MADAM,—When a man, especially a man that lives altogether in the country, undertakes to write to a lady he never saw, he is the awkwardest creature in the world. He begins his letter under the same sensations he would have if he was to accost her in person, only with this difference, that he may take as much time as he pleases for consideration, and need not write a single word that he has not well weighed and pondered beforehand, much less a sentence that he does not think supereminently clever. In every other respect, whether he be engaged in an interview, or in a letter, his behaviour is, for the most part, equally constrained and unnatural. He resolves, as they say, to set the best leg foremost, which often proves to be what Hudibras calls—

‘Not that of bone,  
But much its better—th’ wooden one.’

His extraordinary effort only serves, as in the case

of that hero, to throw him on the other side of his horse; and he owes his want of success, if not to absolute stupidity, to his most earnest endeavour to secure it.

Now I do assure you, madam, that all these sprightly effusions of mine stand entirely clear of the charge of premeditation, and that I never entered upon a business of this kind with more simplicity in my life. I determined, before I began, to lay aside all attempts of the kind I have just mentioned; and being perfectly free from the fetters that self-conceit, commonly called bashfulness, fastens upon the mind, am, as you see, surprisingly brilliant.

My principal design is to thank you in the plainest terms, which always afford the best proof of a man's sincerity, for your obliging present. The seeds will make a figure hereafter in the stove of a much greater man than myself, who am a little man, with no stove at all. Some of them, however, I shall raise for my own amusement, and keep them, as long as they can be kept, in a bark heat, which I give them all the year; and in exchange for those I part with, I shall receive such exotics as are not too delicate for a greenhouse.

I will not omit to tell you, what, no doubt, you have heard already, though, perhaps, you have never made the experiment, that leaves gathered at the fall are found to hold their heat much longer than bark, and are preferable in every respect. Next year I intend to use them myself. I mention it because Mr. Hill told me, some time since, that he was building a stove, in which, I suppose, they will succeed much better than in a frame.

I beg to thank you again, madam, for the very  
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fine salmon you was so kind as to favour me with, which has all the sweetness of a Hertfordshire trout, and resembles it so much in flavour, that, blindfold, I should not have known the difference.

I beg, madam, you will accept all these thanks, and believe them as sincere as they really are. Mr. Hill knows me well enough to be able to vouch for me, that I am not over-much addicted to compliments and fine speeches; nor do I mean either the one or the other, when I assure you that I am, dear madam, not merely for his sake, but your own,—Your most obedient and affectionate servant, Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 25, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—He that tells a long story should take care that it be not made a long story by his manner of telling it. His expression should be natural, and his method clear; the incidents should be interrupted by very few reflections, and parentheses should be entirely discarded. I do not know that poor Mr. Teedon guides himself in the affair of story-telling by any one of these rules, or by any rule indeed that I ever heard of. He has just left us, after a long visit, the greatest part of which he spent in the narration of a certain detail of facts that might have been compressed into a much smaller compass, and my attention to which has wearied and worn out all my spirits. You know how scrupulously nice he is in the choice of his expression; an exactness that soon becomes very inconvenient both to speaker and hearer where there is not a great variety to choose out of. But Saturday evening is come, the time I generally devote to my

correspondence with you; and Mrs. Unwin will not allow me to let it pass without writing, though, having done it herself, both she and you might well spare me upon the present occasion.

I have not yet read your extract from Mr. Scott's letter to Mr. Raban, though I have had an opportunity to do it. I thought it might be better to wait a little, in hope that there might be no need to do it at all. If hereafter it should be necessary to inform him of Mr. Scott's feelings and sentiments upon the subject, I will readily perform the office, and accompany the performance of it with such advice of my own, and such reasons as may happen to occur. In the mean time, I am a little apprehensive that opposition may provoke opposition in return, and set a sharper edge upon inclination, already sufficiently whetted to the business.

We are not the proper persons to give counsel or direction to Mr. Scott; our acquaintance with him is of too short a standing to warrant us in the use of such a liberty. But it is our joint opinion that he will not find himself easily and comfortably settled at Olney while he retains the curacy at Weston. The people of that parish are rather inclined to grumble; and, as we are informed, express some dissatisfaction at finding that they are to have but single service on the Sabbath; and the people here are not well pleased, though they will have the same number of ordinances as before, that they are not to have them at the same time. Some, perhaps, may find the alteration a real inconvenience; and others, who may not find it so, will be glad of an occasion to pretend one. His resignation of Weston would at once annihilate all these complaints, and would.

besides, place the Sunday evening meeting and the whole management of it entirely in his own hands, which, as it would prevent the possibility of any bickerings on account of supernumerary speakers, we should think were a most desirable object. We are well aware that the vicinity of Weston to Ra'nstone<sup>1</sup> is Mr. Scott's reason for still continuing to hold the former; but whether, when weighed in the balance against the mischiefs he may incur by doing it, it will be found a sufficient one, may be a matter deserving consideration. It can be no very difficult thing for his former people to reach him at Olney, though one mile will be added to their journey. If they really prefer him to their new minister, we think such a difficulty as that may be easily surmounted. Whether Mr. Scott's circumstances will afford the sacrifice, we do not know; but Mrs. Unwin thinks, and, if you ask my opinion, I think so too, that if there be no other objection to the measure, he would do well to commit himself to Providence for a supply. Mr. Browne's age, and the probability, nearly related, I suppose, to a certainty, that Mr. Scott will succeed him in the living, seems, of itself, to reduce that difficulty almost to nothing.

— My paper is so intolerably bad, as you may perceive by the running of the ink, that it has quite worn out my patience.

Notwithstanding my purpose to shake hands with the Muse, and take my leave of her for the present, we have already had a *tête-à-tête*, since I sent you the last production. I am as much, or rather more pleased with my new plan, than with any of the foregoing. I mean to give a short summary of the

<sup>1</sup> Ravenstone.

Jewish story, the miraculous interpositions in behalf of that people, their great privileges, their abuse of them, and their consequent destruction ; and then by way of comparison, such another display of the favours vouchsafed to this country, the similar ingratitude with which they have requited them, and the punishment they have therefore reason to expect, unless reformation interpose to prevent it. *Expostulation* is its present title ; but I have not yet found in the writing it, that facility and readiness without which I shall despair to finish it well, or indeed to finish it at all.

Believe me, my dear Sir, with love to Mrs. N.—  
Your ever affectionate,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 27, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In the first place my paper is insufferably bad, so that though this is the second sheet on which I have begun to write, and taken from another quire, I hardly flatter myself that I shall be able to persevere to the end of it.

I thank you for your relation of Mr. Fytche's dispute with the Bishop ; it affords matter for some reflections not altogether favourable to the episcopal order, as it is easy to see that if his lordship had the power, he does not want the inclination to use the thunder of the Vatican, and anathematize a poor gentleman that dares to oppose him, without mercy. I know not in what part of Scripture he will find it revealed, that a patron, by taking a bond of resignation from the person he presents, forfeits all hope of mercy in this world, and that which is to come. Yet he asserts it as gravely as if he knew it to be true ;

but the laity at this time of day are wiser than when they gave their bishops credit for omnipotence ; that cheat will pass no longer.

What narrative can I send you in return ? A part of the Middlesex militia are quartered at this place and at Newport Pagnell. Yesterday being Sunday, was distinguished by a riot, raised at the Bull Inn by some of the officers, whose avowed purpose in doing it was to mortify a town which they understood was inhabited by Methodists. They roared and sung and danced, sometimes in the house, sometimes in the street, and at last quarrelled with a shoemaker's son, and in the fray one of them lost his sword, which he had drawn with an oath that he would cut down poor Crispin. He blustered much, declared he had rather lose his life than his sword, but was obliged to go home without it. This evening the bellman cried it, but with what success has not yet transpired. Oh shame to the name of soldier !

Alas, poor Vestris !<sup>1</sup> what a pitiable object, how truly French in his humiliation, when he bowed his head down to the stage and held it there, as if he never meant to raise it more ! As humble in his abasement as exalted in his capers, equally French in both. Which is most entitled to compassion, the dancer who is obliged, at the expense of all that is called dignity in man, to stoop to the arbitrary requisitions of an enraged assembly, or that assembly themselves who think it worth their while to spend hours in bellowing for satisfaction from the concessions of a dancer ? Considering that life does not

<sup>1</sup> Vestris—the name suggests to-day the famous Madame Vestris (1797-1856), who married Auguste Armand Vestris, ballet-master at the King's Theatre, who died in 1825. The father of Armand Vestris was the dancer to whom Cowper refers. He was born in 1729, and died in 1808.

last for ages, and they know it, it is not unreasonable to say, that both he and they might set a higher value upon their time, and devote it to a better purpose. It is possible, too, you may think that the maker of this wise reflection might himself have been better employed than in writing what follows upon the subject. I subscribe to the truth of the animadversion, and can only say, in my excuse, that the composition is short, did not cost me much time, and may perhaps provoke a longer, which is not always useless. If you please, you may send it to the Poet's corner.

## A CARD.

Poor Vestris, grieved beyond all measure,  
To have incurred so much displeasure ;  
Although a Frenchman, disconcerted,  
And though light heeled, yet heavy hearted,  
Begs humbly to inform his friends,  
Next first of April, he intends  
To take a boat and row right down  
To Cuckold's point, from Richmond town ;  
And as he goes, alert and gay,  
Leap all the bridges in his way.  
The boat borne downward with the tide  
Shall catch him safe on t'other side ;  
He humbly hopes by this expedient,  
To prove himself their most obedient,  
(Which shall be always his endeavour,)  
And jump into their former favour.

I have not forgot, though when I wrote last I did not think of answering your kind invitation. I can only say at present, that Stock shall be my first visit, but that visiting at this time would be attended with insupportable awkwardness to me, and with such as the visited themselves would assuredly feel the weight of. My witticisms are only current upon paper now, and that sort of paper currency must

serve, like the Congress dollars, for want of the more valuable coin, myself.

We thank you for the intended salmon, and beg you would get yourself made Bishop of Chichester as soon as possible, that we may have to thank you for every kind of eatable fish the British coast produces.

Our joint love attends yourself and whole family, together with our respectful compliments to your uncle.—Yours ever,

Wm. COWPER.

- I have hurried to the end as fast as possible, being weary of a letter that is one continued blot.

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TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 5, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that cheap ingredient, the name of the author. If my name, therefore, will serve them in any degree, as a passport into the public notice, they are welcome to it; but in that case I must desire to have the *Progress of Error* returned to me that I may cancel the passage relating to *Thelyphthora*, for though in that passage I have neither belied my own judgment nor slandered the Author, yet on account of Relationship, and for reasons I need not suggest to you, I should not choose to make a public attack upon his performance. Mr. Johnson will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, Esq.  
Of the Inner Temple.

If you are of my mind, I think *Table Talk* will be the best to begin with, as the subjects of it are perhaps more popular; and one would wish, at first setting out, to catch the public by the ear, and hold them by it as fast as possible, that they may be willing to hear one on a second and a third occasion.

The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think that it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I mean to stickle for it as a pretty creature of my own that I am loth to part with—but I am apprehensive that without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph would not show to advantage. If the world had been filled with men like yourself, I should never have written it; but thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle, if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularity I did not feel. As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage; notwithstanding which it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances, and with his power to embolden them. You will be so good as to insist upon it as from me that when Mr. Johnson is in possession of my name he shall not on any account whatever

prefix it to Sir Airy<sup>1</sup> or by any means, direct or indirect, either now or hereafter, assert or even insinuate that I wrote it. I believe I have drawn up this precaution with all the precision of a lawyer without intending it. I mean, however, no more than to desire you to impress him with an idea of the seriousness with which I make this stipulation.

I am glad that the myrtles reached you safe, but am persuaded from past experience that no management will keep them long alive in London, especially in the city. Our English [sorts], the natives of the country, are for the most part too delicate to thrive there, much more the nice Italian. To give them, however, the best chance they can have, the lady must keep them well watered, giving them a moderate quantity in summer time every other day, and in winter about twice a week ; not spring-water, for that would kill them. At Michaelmas as much of the mould as can be taken out without disturbing the roots must be evacuated, and its place supplied with fresh, the lighter the better. And once in two years the plants must be drawn out of their pots with the entire ball of earth about them, and the matted roots pared off with a sharp knife, when they must be planted again with an addition of rich light earth as before. Thus dealt with, they will grow luxuriantly in a green-house, where they can have plenty sweet air, which is absolutely necessary to their health. I used to purchase them at Covent Garden almost every year, when I lived in the Temple ; but even in that airy situation they were sure to lose their leaf in winter, and seldom recovered it again in spring. I wish them a better fate at Hoxton.

<sup>1</sup> Anti-Thelyphthora. See p. 193 of this vol., and p. 330 Globe Edition.

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Olney has seen this day what it never saw before, and what will serve it to talk of, I suppose, for years to come. At eleven o'clock this morning a party of soldiers entered the town, driving before them another party, who, after obstinately defending the bridge for some time, were obliged to quit it and run. They ran in very good order, frequently faced about and fired, but were at last obliged to surrender prisoners of war. There has been much drumming and shouting, much scampering about in the dirt, but not an inch of lace made in the town, at least at the Silver End of it.

It is our joint request that you will not again leave us unwritten to for a fortnight. We are so like yourselves in this particular, that we cannot help ascribing so long a silence to the worst cause. The longer your letters the better, but a short one is better than none.

Mrs. Unwin is pretty well, and adds the greetings of her love to mine,—Yours, my dear friend,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*March 18, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A slight disorder in my larnboard eye may possibly prevent my writing you a long letter, and would perhaps have prevented my writing at all, if I had not known that you account a fortnight's silence a week too long.

I am sorry that I gave you the trouble to write twice upon so trivial a subject as the passage in question. I did not understand by your first objections to it, that you thought it so exceptionable as you do; but being better informed, I immediately

resolved to expunge it, and subjoin a few lines which you will oblige me by substituting in its place. I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons: first, because I do not think myself qualified, in point of intelligence, to form a decided opinion on any such topics; and secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all. The following verses are designed to succeed immediately after

— fights with justice on his side.  
Let laurels, drench'd in pure Parnassian dews,  
Reward *his* memory, dear to every muse, &c.

I am obliged to you for your advice with respect to the manner of publication, and feel myself inclined to be determined by it. So far as I have proceeded on the subject of *Expostulation*, I have written with tolerable ease to myself, and in my own opinion (for an opinion I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,) with more emphasis and energy than in either of the others. But it seems to open upon me with an abundance of matter, that forebodes a considerable length; and the time of year is come when, what with walking and gardening, I can find but little leisure for the pen. I mean, however, as soon as I have engrafted a new scion into the *Progress of Error*, instead of 'Thelyphthora,' and when I have transcribed *Truth* and sent it to you, to apply myself to the composition last undertaken, with as much industry as I can. If, therefore, the three first are put into the press while I am spinning and weaving the last, the whole may perhaps be ready for publication before the

proper season will be past. I mean at present that a few select smaller pieces, about seven or eight perhaps, the best I can find in a bookful that I have by me, shall accompany them. All together, they will furnish, I should imagine, a volume of tolerable bulk, that need not be indebted to an unreasonable breadth of margin for the importance of its figure.

If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim, much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—Amusement. There is nothing but this—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, Poetry excepted—that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success to make an amusement of it.

In my account of the battle fought at Olney, I laid a snare for your curiosity, and succeeded. I supposed it would have an enigmatical appearance, and so it had; but like most other riddles, when it comes to be solved, you will find that it was not worth the trouble of conjecture.—There are soldiers quartered at Newport and at Olney. These met, by order of their respective officers, in Emberton Marsh,

performed all the manœuvres of a deedy battle, and the result was that this town was taken. Since I wrote, they have again encountered with the same intention ; and Mr. Raban kept a room<sup>1</sup> for me and Mrs. Unwin, that we might sit and view them at our ease. We did so, but it did not answer our expectation ; for before the contest could be decided, the powder on both sides being expended, the combatants were obliged to leave it an undecided contest. If it were possible that when two great armies spend the night in expectation of a battle, a third could silently steal away their ammunition and arms of every kind, what a comedy would it make of that which always has such a tragical conclusion !—Yours, my dear friend,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

April 2, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Fine weather, and a variety of *extraforaneous* occupations (search Johnson's dictionary for that word, and if not found there, insert it—for it saves a deal of circumlocution, and is very lawfully compounded) make it difficult (excuse the length of the parenthesis, which I did not foresee the length of when I began it, and which may perhaps a little perplex the sense of what I am writing, though, as I seldom deal in that figure of speech, I have the less need to make an apology for doing it at present), make it difficult (I say) for me to find opportunities for writing. My morning is engrossed by the garden ; and in the afternoon, till I have

<sup>1</sup> Tom Raban's house being the last on the left side as one approaches the bridge, his windows overlooked the meadows.

drunk tea, I am fit for nothing. After five o'clock we walk; and when the walk is over, lassitude recommends rest, and again I become fit for nothing. The current hour, therefore, which (I need not tell you) is comprised in the interval between four and five is devoted to your service, as the only one in the twenty-four which is not otherwise engaged.

I do not wonder that you have felt a great deal upon the occasion you mention in your last, especially on account of the asperity you have met with in the behaviour of your friend. Reflect, however, that as it is natural to you to have very fine feelings, it is equally natural to some other tempers to leave those feelings entirely out of the question, and to speak to you, and to act towards you, just as they do towards the rest of mankind, without the least attention to the irritability of your system. Men of a rough and unsparing address should take great care that they be always in the right; the justness and propriety of their sentiments and censures being the only tolerable apology that can be made for such a conduct, especially in a country where civility of behaviour is inculcated even from the cradle. But in the instance now under our contemplation I think you a sufferer under the weight of an animadversion not founded in truth, and which, consequently, you did not deserve. I account him faithful in the pulpit who dissembles nothing that he believes, for fear of giving offence. To accommodate a discourse to the judgment and opinion of others for the sake of pleasing them, though by doing so we are obliged to depart widely from our own, is to be unfaithful to ourselves at least, and cannot be accounted fidelity to Him whom we profess to serve. But there are

few men who do not stand in need of the exercise of charity and forbearance; and the gentleman in question has afforded you an ample opportunity in this respect to show how readily, though differing in your views, you can practise all that he could possibly expect from you, if your persuasion corresponded exactly with his own.

With respect to *Monsieur le Curé*,<sup>1</sup> I think you not quite excusable for suffering such a man to give you any uneasiness at all. The grossness and injustice of his demand ought to be its own antidote. If a robber should miscall you a pitiful fellow for not carrying a purse full of gold about you, would his brutality give you any concern? I suppose not. Why, then, have you been distressed in the present instance?

I think you pay dear for an agreeable companion in the person of your own curate when you enlarge his stipend to a sum that you say exceeds what you can conveniently afford, especially after having such pregnant proofs that his motives for staying with you, if he stays, are of the pecuniary kind. But you know the man and I do not. If he is worth what you buy him for now, I wish he may improve upon your hands, so that you may hereafter have additional cause to rejoice in your bargain.

Poor Mrs. Ruse is much an object of compassion. I should apprehend that when she insists upon an allowance of three hundred pounds a year as the condition of a separation, she acts under the influence of somebody better acquainted with the value of money than the worth of peace, for surely the sum of one hundred pounds is no object, at least

<sup>1</sup> See letter of Feb. 6, 1781, p. 266.

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ought not to be an object, when it stands in competition with the inestimable happiness of getting rid of such a husband.

I have not room for more, except to add our love to all at Stock, and to subscribe myself theirs and yours,

W.M. COWPER.

Thanks for the salmon, which was very fine.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

April 8, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Since I commenced author, my letters are even less worth your acceptance than they were before. I shall soon, however, lay down the character, and cease to trouble you with directions to a printer, at least till the summer is over. If I live to see the return of winter, I may perhaps assume it again; but my appetite for fame is not keen enough to combat with my love of fine weather, my love of indolence, and my love of gardening employments.

I send you by Mr. Old<sup>1</sup> my *Works* complete, bound in brown paper, and numbered according to the series in which I would have them published. With respect to the poem called *Truth*, it is so true that it can hardly fail of giving offence to an unenlightened reader. I think, therefore, that in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface, such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every

<sup>1</sup> An Olney farmer.

grace of propriety to recommend it. Or, if you are not averse to the task, and your avocations will allow you to undertake it, and if you think it would still be more proper, I should be glad to be indebted to you for the preface to the whole. I wish you, however, to consult your own judgment upon the occasion, and to engage in either of these works, or neither, just as your discretion guides you.

The observations contained in the *Progress of Error*, though, as you say, of general application, have yet such an unlucky squint at the author of *Thelyphthora*, that they will be almost as sure to strike him in the sore place, as he will be to read the poem, if published with my name; and I would by no means wish to involve you in the resentment that I shall probably incur by those lines, which might be the consequence of our walking arm-in-arm into the public notice. For my own part, I have my answer ready, if I should be called upon; but as you have corresponded with him upon the subject, and have closed that correspondence in as amicable a way as the subject of it would permit, you may perhaps think it would appear like a departure from the friendly moderation of your conduct to give an open countenance and encouragement to a work in which he seems to be so freely treated. But, after all, there is no necessity for your name, though I should choose by all means to be honoured with it, if there be no unanswerable objection. You will find the substituted passage in the *Progress of Error* just where the ground was occupied by the reflections upon Mr. Madan's performance.

Mr. Hill's answer seems to have no fault but what it owes to a virtue. His great charity and candour

have in my mind excluded from it that animation and energy which even a good man might lawfully show when answering a book which could hardly fail to excite a little indignation. Mildness and meekness are not more plainly recommended in Scripture in some instances than sharpness of reproof and severity in others.

I am very well satisfied with the commendation the reviewers have bestowed upon Sir Airy.<sup>1</sup> It is as much as I hoped for, and I question much whether they will speak so favourably of my next publication.

I have written a great deal to-day, which must be my excuse for an abrupt conclusion. Our love attends you both. We are in pretty good health, Mrs. Unwin indeed better than usual; and as to me, I ail nothing but the incurable ailment.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Thanks for the cocoa-nut.

I send a cucumber, not of my own raising, and yet raised by me.

‘Solve this enigma, dark enough  
To puzzle any brains  
That are not downright puzzle-proof,  
And eat it for your pains.’

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Monday, April 23, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having not the least doubt

<sup>1</sup> In the poem *Anti-Thelyphthora*, Sir Airy is the Rev. Martin Madan, and Sir Marmadane is Mr. Badcock of the *Monthly Review*, who had severely handled Mr. Madan’s book.

of your ability to execute just such a preface as I should wish to see prefixed to my publication, and being convinced that you have no good foundation for those which you yourself entertain upon the subject, I neither withdraw my requisition nor abate one jot of the earnestness with which I made it. I admit the delicacy of the occasion, but am far from apprehending that you will therefore find it difficult to succeed. You can draw a hair-stroke where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence.

With respect to the Heathen and what I have said about them, the subject is of that kind which every man must settle for himself, and on which we can proceed no further than hypothesis and opinion will carry us. I was willing, however, to obviate an objection I foresaw, and to do it in a way not derogatory from the truth of the Gospel, yet at the same time as conciliatory as possible to the prejudices of the objector. After all, indeed, I see no medium; either we must suppose them lost, or if saved, saved by virtue of the only propitiation. They seem to me, on the principles of equity, to stand in much the same predicament, and to be entitled (at least according to human apprehensions of justice) to much the same allowance as Infants; both partakers of a sinful nature, and both unavoidably ignorant of the remedy. Infants I suppose universally saved, because impeccable; and the virtuous Heathen, having had no opportunity to sin against Revelation, and having made a conscientious use of the light of Nature, I should suppose saved too. But I drop a subject on which I could say a good deal more, for two reasons: first, because I am writing a letter, and

not an essay; and secondly, because, after all I might write about it, I could come to no certain conclusion.

I once had thoughts of annexing a few smaller pieces to those I have sent you; but having only very few that I accounted worthy to bear them company, and those for the most part on subjects less calculated for utility than amusement, I changed my mind. If hereafter I should accumulate a sufficient number of these *minutiae* to make a miscellaneous volume, which is not impossible, I may perhaps collect and print them.

I am much obliged to you for the interest you take in the appearance of my Poems, and much pleased by the alacrity with which you do it. Your favourable opinion of them affords me a comfortable presage with respect to that of the public; for though I make allowances for your partiality to me and mine, because mine, yet I am sure you would not suffer me unadmonished to add myself to the multitude of insipid rhymers, with whose productions the world is already too much pestered.

It is worth while to send *you* a riddle, you make such a variety of guesses, and turn and tumble it about with such an industrious curiosity. The solution of that in question is—let me see; it requires some consideration to explain it, even though I made it. I raised the seed that produced the plant that produced the fruit, that produced the seed that produced the fruit I sent you. This latter seed I gave to the gardener of Tyringham,<sup>1</sup> who brought me the cucumber you mention. Thus you see I raised it—that is to say, I raised it virtually by

<sup>1</sup> A village three miles from Olney.

having raised its progenitor ; and yet I did not raise it, because the identical seed from which it grew was raised at a distance. You observe I did not speak rashly when I spoke of it as dark enough to pose an Oedipus, and have no need to call your own sagacity in question for falling short of the discovery.

A report has prevailed at Olney that you are coming in a fortnight ;<sup>1</sup> but taking it for granted that you know best when you shall come, and that you will make us happy in the same knowledge as soon as you are possessed of it yourself, I did not venture to build any sanguine expectations upon it.

Mr. Madan seems to be in the condition of that gentleman of most candid memory, who though he might be confuted was resolved never to be convinced. I have at last read the second volume of his work, and had some hope that I should prevail with myself to read the first likewise. But endless repetitions, unwarranted conclusions, and wearisome declamations, conquered my perseverance, and obliged me to leave the task unfinished. He boasts in his Introduction that he has attended to a happy mixture of the *utile dulci*. The former I find not, and the latter so sparingly afforded as to be scarce perceptible. You told us, some time since, that his reasons for writing on such a subject were certainly known to a few. If you judge it not imprudent to communicate them by the post, we should be glad to know them too. You know that we are hermetically sealed, and that no secret is the less a secret for our participation of it. I began his book at the latter end, because the first part of it was engaged when I received the second ; but I had not so good an

<sup>1</sup> Newton did not get to Olney till June. See letter of 7th July 1781.

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appetite as a soldier of the Guards, who, I was informed when I lived in London, would for a small matter eat up a cat alive, beginning at her tail and finishing with her whiskers.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love. She is tolerably well, and will rejoice to hear that her application in behalf of your nephew has succeeded. Not having lately heard from Stock, she is ignorant of what has passed.

My love to Mrs. Newton.—Yours, *ut semper,*  
WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*April 25, 1781.*

MY DEAR SIR,—While I thought of publishing only the four pieces already sent, I did not give myself the trouble to peruse with any attention what smaller poems I have by me. But on finding it necessary to make an addition, I have again looked them over; and am glad to find after an inquiry as critical as an author can be supposed to make into the merits of his own productions, that I am in possession of eight hundred lines that may safely, I hope, venture to show themselves in public. To these I would add those copies I translated from Vincent Bourne; but having no transcript of them myself, I must beg you to take the trouble either to send them hither, or to get them written out for me. The whole together will amount nearly to a thousand lines; and as I suppose Mr. Johnson will not allot more than one page to one piece, they will fill more paper than the same number of lines written in continuation, and upon the same subject. There are times when I cannot write, and the present is such a

time; and were it not, I should yet prefer this method of swelling the volume to that of filling the vacuity with one long-winded poem like the preceding.

A variety of measures on a variety of subjects will relieve both the mind and the ear, and may possibly prevent that weariness of which there might otherwise be no small danger.

I hope that what I said in my last has determined you to undertake the preface; in that case the gentleman you mentioned (Mr. Foster) must, upon your walking out of the lines, march in to supply your place. I have no outline to send you, neither shall I have time for any thing but to transcribe, which I will do as fast as I can to be legible, and remit my labours to you by the first opportunity—title-page and motto at the same time.

We are sorry that you have not heard from Stock, but hope, and have no doubt notwithstanding this silence, that the affair will be settled to your wish. I write in much haste, and have only to add my thanks for your negotiations, and our joint love to you both, with remembrance to all friends at Hoxton.  
—Yours, my dear sir,

Wm. COWPER.

I am at this time a member of the Inner Temple.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

May 1, 1781.

YOUR mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology; I might otherwise plead that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as

well as for myself, that I should let it alone; but all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest, are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must*. You have still, however, one comfort left, that what I must write, you may, or may not read, just as it shall please you; unless Lady Anne<sup>1</sup> at your elbow should say, you *must* read it, and then like a true knight you will obey without looking out for a remedy.

I do not love to harp upon strings that, to say the least, are not so musical as one would wish. But you, I know, have many times sacrificed your own feelings to those of others, and, where an act of charity leads you, are not easily put out of your way. This consideration encourages me just to insinuate that your silence on the subject of a certain nomination is distressful to more than you would wish, in particular to the little boy whose clothes are outgrown and worn out; and to his mother, who is unwilling to furnish him with a new suit, having reason to suppose that the long blue petticoat would soon supersede it, if she should.

In the press, and speedily, will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them; but the truth is, that they are most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two-thirds of the compilation will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Unwin's wife. She was a Miss Shuttleworth.

in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand and five hundred lines; are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of

‘Table Talk.’	‘Truth.’
‘The Progress of Error.’	‘Expostulation.’

Mr. Newton writes a Preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world (if that Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing), has been this; that till within these few days I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine, to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come.—Yours, my dear friend, with your mother's love,

W. C.

I shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne, in your next frank. My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*May 9, 1781.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am in the press, and it is in vain to deny it. But how mysterious is the conveyance of intelligence from one end to the other of your great city!—Not many days since, except one man, and he but a little taller than yourself, all London was ignorant of it; for I do not suppose that the public prints have yet announced this most agreeable tidings, the title-page, which is the basis of the advertisement, having so lately reached the publisher; and now it is known to you, who live at least two miles distant from my confidant upon the occasion.

My labours are principally the production of the last winter; all, indeed, except a few of the minor pieces. When I can find no other occupation, I think, and when I think, I am very apt to do it in rhyme. Hence it comes to pass that the season of the year which generally pinches off the flowers of poetry, unfolds mine, such as they are, and crowns me with a winter garland. In this respect, therefore, I and my contemporary bards are by no means upon a par. They write when the delightful influences of fine weather, fine prospects, and a brisk motion of the animal spirits, make poetry almost the language of nature; and I, when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel, and when a reasonable man would as little expect to succeed in verse as to hear a blackbird whistle. This must be my apology to you for whatever want of fire and animation you may observe in what you will shortly have the perusal of. As to the public, if they like me not,

there is no remedy. A friend will weigh and consider all disadvantages, and make as large allowances as an author can wish, and larger perhaps than he has any right to expect; but not so the world at large. Whatever they do not like, they will not by any apology be persuaded to forgive, and it would be in vain to tell *them* that I wrote my verses in January, for they would immediately reply, ‘Why did not you write them in May?’ A question that might puzzle a wiser head than we poets are generally blessed with.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Olney, May 10, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is Friday; I have just drunk tea, and just perused your letter; and though this answer to it cannot set off till Sunday, I obey the warm impulse I feel, which will not permit me to postpone the business till the regular time of writing.

I expected you would be grieved; if you had not been so, those sensibilities which attend you upon every other occasion must have left you upon this. I am sorry that I have given you pain, but not sorry that you have felt it. A concern of that sort would be absurd, because it would be to regret your friendship for me, and to be dissatisfied with the effect of it. Allow yourself, however, three minutes only for reflection, and your penetration must necessarily dive into the motives of my conduct. In the first place, and by way of preface, remember that I do not (whatever your partiality may incline you to do) account it of much consequence to any friend of

mine whether he is, or is not, employed by me upon such an occasion. But all affected renunciations of political merit apart, and all unaffected expressions of the sense I have of my own littleness in the poetical character too, the obvious and only reason why I resorted to Mr. Newton, and not to my friend Unwin, was this : that the former lived at London, the latter at Stock ; the former was upon the spot to correct the press, to give instructions respecting any sudden alterations, and to settle with the publisher every thing that might possibly occur in the course of such a business ; the latter could not be applied to for these purposes without what I thought would be a manifest encroachment on his kindness ; because it might happen that the troublesome office might cost him now and then a journey, which it was absolutely impossible for me to endure the thought of.

When I wrote to you for the copies you have sent me, I told you I was making a collection, but not with the design to publish. There is nothing truer than that at that time I had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume of Poems to the press. I had several small pieces that might amuse, but I would not, when I publish, make the amusement of the reader my only object. When the winter deprived me of other employments, I began to compose, and seeing six or seven months before me which would naturally afford me much leisure for such a purpose, I undertook a piece of some length ; that finished, another ; and so on, till I had amassed the number of lines I mentioned in my last.

I should add more, but your mother wants to put in a word. There are two wanting of my transla-

tions of Bourne, of which the Glowworm is one.  
Perhaps you never had it.—Yours,                   W. C.

*P.S.*—‘ Believe of me what you please, but not that I am indifferent to you or your friendship for us on any occasion.’ We have no franks.

(*In Mrs. Unwin's hand.*)

MY DEAR BILLY,—Accept my most sincere thanks for your favour done me by that conferred on Mr. Newton's relation. I am sorry Mr. Newton's manner shocked you ; but am rejoiced it had no other effect. It was not for want of sensibility of the obligation, I am certain ; but I never in my life knew one that seemed so much at a loss as he is for expressing his feelings by word of mouth. Last Sunday's post brought Mr. Cowper a letter from him, with the following passage :—‘ Yesterday Mr. Unwin came into the vestry and presented me with a nomination to the hospital. He did it very cordially and handsomely, and I thanked him very heartily and honestly. For though I had no right to expect such a favour from him merely on my own account, I am very willing to consider myself personally obliged to him for it. I know Mrs. Unwin will believe I am duly sensible of her kindness, and I call my best thanks to her but a peppercorn, because they fall short of what I mean. I am no loser by this disbursement of thanks to him and to her, for Mr. and Mrs. Nind have paid me in kind.’—I am, my dear Billy, your obliged and affectionate mother,

M. U.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 13, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We thank you for the anecdote sent us in compliance with our desire. Added at the end of a certain treatise, it would operate as a powerful antidote to the erroneous opinion it inculcates, and sufficiently explain the mystery of a sensible man<sup>1</sup> addicting himself to a silly enterprise, and vainly endeavouring to accomplish it by reasoning that would disgrace a boy.

You are not sorry, I suppose, that your correspondence with him is at an end; you might perhaps have easily secured the continuance of it had you been less explicit, but it must have been at the expense of that point of honour which a spiritual warrior of your rank and character will upon no consideration abandon. A gentler reprobation, an air of plausibility, or any disguise of your real sentiments whatever, would still have left room for what he would have called a friendly intercourse. But your friendship for him has now produced the strongest proof of its sincerity; and though he is not able to bear it, the time may come (it will be unhappy for him indeed if it never should) when he will know how to value it and to thank you for it.

The rudeness of his answer—I was going to give it a harsher character—exceeds all that I could have thought it possible he could be provoked to treat you with, merely because you cannot see with his eyes, and have had the boldness to tell him so.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Martin Madan.

M.<sup>1</sup> quarrels with N.,<sup>1</sup> for M. wrote a book,  
 And N. did not like it, which M. could not brook.  
 So he call'd him a bigot, a wrangler, a monk,  
 With as many hard names as would line a good trunk,  
 And set up his back, and claw'd like a cat,  
 But N. liked it never the better for that.  
 Now N. had a wife, and he wanted but one,  
 Which stuck in M.'s stomach as cross as a bone.  
 It has always been reckon'd a just cause of strife  
 For a man to make free with another man's wife ;  
 But the strife is the strangest that ever was known,  
 If a man must be scolded for loving his own.

Mrs. Unwin rejoices that the nomination affair is at last accomplished, she accounts your thanks for it more than a sufficient recompense, and is sorry it is not in her power to give you and Mrs. Newton more important proofs of her regard. I asked her what I should say, and she bade me say all this.

I am ready to wish that you may not yet have sent the Translations of Bourne<sup>2</sup> to Johnson, because I find it necessary to put forth a new edition of the two last stanzas of the Cricket. One of them was disgraced by a false rhyme, and the other was too long by two lines. By the way, Mr. Unwin has sent me three of them, but the Glowworm and the Cantab he has not sent.

This last victory over the Americans<sup>3</sup> will go near to verify my poetical prediction, and Sir Joshua will have nothing to do but to record the completion of a prophecy which is the more respectable, because when first delivered it seemed so very improbable.

<sup>1</sup> M., Martin Madan ; N., John Newton.

<sup>2</sup> See letter of 23rd May 1781.

<sup>3</sup> On March 15, 1781, Lord Cornwallis defeated General Greene at Guilford Courthouse ; on the 19th of the following October Cornwallis capitulated at Yorktown.

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Rebellion, it should seem, must soon be extinguished, crippled by defeat and destitute of resources, and extinction of the war will soon follow it. I have taken prudent care, however, to save my credit at all events; and having foretold both fair weather and foul, the former in the piece just alluded to, and the latter in Expostulation, fall back, fall edge, as they say, like the Newton-shepherds, my soothsaying is sure to be accomplished.

There is, I am afraid, a perverseness and persevering spirit of opposition to Mr. Scott that will grieve you, though you will not suffer it to disturb your temper. Mr. Scott acts wisely, and takes no notice of it either in conversation with the people or in the pulpit.

The ducks could not be pulled, because it was necessary they should be killed on a Sunday.—Yours, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton's,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*May 21, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am not so impatient to see myself in print as to be at all disconcerted by the delay. I was sufficiently aware that with Johnson's utmost despatch he would be too late, and that the summer, which is just at the door, would tread too close upon the heels of the publication. I had much rather, therefore, proceed leisurely as he advises (if he will indeed go on to print at his leisure), and so avail myself of the complete opportunity that winter will bring with it, than open my stall just when the Fair is over. —

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The case standing thus, and this leisurely proceeding being so favourable to my purpose, I have conceived a design to save you the trouble of revising the proofs, and that for two reasons: First, because your time is precious, and mine is not so; and secondly, because having written nothing of late that I do not retain *memoriter*, it is impossible for the alteration of a word or the least inaccuracy to escape me.

I mean, therefore, to furnish myself with London and country franks, and to desire Johnson to transmit the proofs to me.

It would have a strange appearance, and is hardly a supposable case, but for amusement sake we will endeavour to suppose it for a moment. A man (he must be a confirmed Stoic) stands encompassed by a dozen others—one tweaks his nose, one pinches his sides, one slaps his right cheek, and one his left; one treads upon his toes, one spits in his face, one thrusts pins into the calves of his legs, and one kicks him on the breech; one raps the knuckles of one hand, one of the other; one sets a fool's cap upon his head, and another, a man of some wit and with a reasonable share of humour, sneers, laughs, and makes faces at him, while his associates are thus employed in tormenting him. The patient (for patient he must needs be if he keeps his senses) affects to be all the while perfectly at his ease, denies that any body touches him, calls them his dear friends, observes that it is a very fine day, and takes snuff.

Extravagant as this picture may seem, it bears, I think, some resemblance to Mr. Madan. He is, or would seem to be, insensible of the many smart strokes he receives from his antagonists; they are

a parcel of insignificant wretches—some of them indeed his very good friends, whose opposition to his book is rather an argument of their own bigotry or folly than any inconvenience to him; and as to the rest, whether they write, or the wind whistles, is a matter of the most absolute indifference. And yet, as in the case above delineated, the unhappy gentleman must undoubtedly suffer a great deal, so must the author of *Thelyphthora*, if the two clubs of learning and logic, and the stinging nettles of wit and humour, can possibly make him feel. By the way, we shall be glad if you can bring Mr. Barton's book with you.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love. We both wait for the day appointed with a pleasing sort of impatience, and comfort ourselves with the thought that though we cannot hasten its approach one moment, it will come, and must come, and that the interval, let what will happen, and how long soever it may seem, can be but a fortnight. We mean if you are able to keep your assignation.

She will be obliged to Mrs. Newton if she will be so good as to bring with her six tooth brushes, a quarter of a pound of oystershell powder, and two pounds of the same bohea as before. We shall hope to see you at dinner on Saturday, and as much sooner as you please; we always dine at two.—Yours, my dear sir, and Mrs. Newton's, *con ogni rispetto affectuoso,*

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*May 28, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If a writer's friends have need

of patience, how much more the writer ! Your desire to see my muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion ; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—‘The poet is coming !’—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter.

This misfortune, however, comes not without its attendant advantage ; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself ; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned ! A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud of. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler, who will fancy himself a poet too, and, what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now as I choose to be responsible for nobody’s dulness but my own, I am

a little comforted when I reflect that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence, and yet not without your assistance. It will be quite necessary that the correspondence between me and Johnson should be carried on without the expense of postage, because proof sheets would make double or treble letters, which expense, as in every instance it must occur twice, first when the packet is sent, and again when it is returned, would be rather inconvenient to me, who, as you perceive, am forced to live by my wits, and to him who hopes to get a little matter no doubt by the same means. Half a dozen franks, therefore, to me, and *totidem* to him, will be singularly acceptable, if you can, without feeling it in any respect a trouble, procure them for me.—Johnson, bookseller, St. Paul's Churchyard.

My neckcloths being all worn out, I intend to wear stocks, but not unless they are more fashionable than the former. In that case, I shall be obliged to you if you will buy me a handsome stock-buckle for a very little money; for twenty or twenty-five shillings perhaps a second-hand affair may be purchased that will make a figure at Olney.

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate, because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, *that* is epigrammatic and witty in Latin which would be perfectly insipid in English; and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult and the most expensive

part of the whole composition, and could not perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in comparing the 'Jackdaw' with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point which, though smart enough in the Latin, would, in English, have appeared as plain and as blunt as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to him. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for every thing that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all this drollery there is a mixture of rational, and even religious reflection at times; and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense; who is always entertaining, and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found

even in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas than by the neatness and purity of his verse ; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks and box his ears to put it out again.

I am delighted with your project, but not with the view I have of its success. If the world would form its opinion of the clerical character at large, from yours in particular, I have no doubt but the event would be as prosperous as you could wish. But I suppose there is not a member of either House who does not see within the circle of his own acquaintance a minister, perhaps many ministers, whose integrity would contribute but little to the effect of such a bill. Here are seven or eight in the neighbourhood of Olney who have shaken hands with sobriety, and who would rather suppress the Church, were it not for the emoluments annexed, than discourage the sale of strong beer in a single instance. Were I myself in Parliament, I am not sure that I could favour your scheme ; are there not to be found within five miles of almost every neighbourhood parsons who would purchase well-accustomed public-houses, because they could secure them a license, and patronise them when they had done ? I think no penalty would prevent the abuse, on account of the difficulty of proof, and that no ingenuity could guard against all the possible abuses. To sum up all in few words, the generality of the clergy, especially within these last twenty or thirty years, have worn their circingles so loose, that I verily believe no measure that proposed an accession of privilege to an order which the laity retain but little respect for

would meet with the countenance of the legislature. You will do me the justice to suppose that I do not say these things to gratify a spleenetic humour or a censorious turn of mind; far from it, it may add, perhaps, to the severity of the foregoing observations to assert—but if it does, I cannot help asserting—that I verily believe them to be founded upon fact, and that I am sure, partly from my own knowledge, and partly from the report of those whose veracity I can depend upon, that, in this part of the world at least, many of the most profligate characters are the very men to whom the morals, and even the souls of others are intrusted; and I cannot suppose that the diocese of Lincoln, or this part of it in particular, is more unfortunate in that respect than the rest of the kingdom.

Since I began to write long poems, I seem to turn up my nose at the idea of a short one. I have lately entered upon one, which if ever finished, cannot easily be comprised in much less than a thousand lines! But this must make part of a second publication, and be accompanied in due time by others not yet thought of, for it seems (which I did not know till the bookseller had occasion to tell me so) that single pieces stand no chance, and that nothing less than a volume will go down. You yourself afford me a proof of the certainty of this intelligence by sending me franks which nothing less than a volume can fill. I have accordingly sent you one; but am obliged to add that had the wind been in any other point of the compass, or, blowing as it does from the east, had it been less boisterous, you must have been contented with a much shorter letter, but the abridgment of every other occupation is very favourable to that of writing.

Our love attends all the family at Stock.

I am glad I did not expect to hear from you by this post, for the boy has lost the bag in which your letter must have been enclosed—another reason for my prolixity!—Yours affectionately, W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*May 28, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I believe I never give you trouble without feeling more than I give; so much by way of preface and apology.

Thus stands the case. Johnson has begun to print, and Mr. Newton has already corrected the first sheet. This unexpected despatch makes it necessary for me to furnish myself with means of communication, viz. the franks, as soon as may be. There are reasons (I believe I mentioned them in my last) why I choose to revise the proofs myself; nevertheless, if your delicacy must suffer the puncture of a pin's point in procuring the franks for me, I release you entirely from the task; you are as free as if I had never mentioned them. But you will oblige me by a speedy answer upon this subject, because it is expedient that the printer should know to whom he is to send his copy · and when the press is once set, those humble servants of the poets are rather impatient of any delay, because the types are wanted for other authors who are equally in haste to be born.

This fine weather I suppose sets you on horseback, and allures the ladies into the garden. If I was at Stock I should be of their party; and while they sat knotting or netting in the shade, should comfort

myself with the thought that I had not a beast under me whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture; I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind. When I was a boy I excelled at cricket and football; but the fame I acquired by achievements in that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing since. I am sure, however, that she did not design me for a horseman;<sup>1</sup> and that, if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever. I am rather straitened in time, and not very rich in materials, therefore, with our joint love to you all, conclude myself, yours ever,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

May 28, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am much obliged to you for the pains you have taken with my *Table Talk*, and wish that my *viv& voce* Table Talk could repay you for the trouble you have had with the written one.

I am quite surprised at Johnson's diligence, and begin to wish, while reading your account of it, that I had left the business of correction in your hands; but presently recollecting that it is a tedious troublesome employment, and fit only for the author himself to be burthened with, I relapsed into my

<sup>1</sup> It is to Cowper's bad horsemanship that we owe the humour of *John Gilpin*.

former sentiment. My franks are not yet ready, but I shall lose no time in procuring them if they are to be got. I enclose a line to Johnson, to tell him that if in the meantime, and while you are absent from town, another parcel of the proof should be ready for revisal, I wish him to send it hither by the diligence. I am as well convinced of the accuracy and exactness with which you would perform the task as it is possible for me to be of my own, and if I can obtain no franks shall after all have recourse to your assistance.

The season is wonderfully improved within this day or two; and if these cloudless skies are continued to us, or rather if the cold winds do not set in again, promises you a pleasant excursion, as far at least as the weather can conduce to make it such. You seldom complain of too much sunshine; and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity. If you could spend a day now and then in those forests, and return with a wish to England, it would be no small addition to the number of your best pleasures. But *pennæ non homini datae*. The time will come perhaps (but death must come first) when you will be able to visit them without either danger, trouble, or expense, and when the contemplation of those well-remembered scenes will awaken in you emotions of gratitude and praise surpassing all you could possibly sustain at present. In this

sense, I suppose, there is a heaven upon earth at all times ; and that the disembodied spirit may find a peculiar joy arising from the contemplation of those places it was formerly conversant with, and so far, at least, be reconciled to a world it was once so weary of, as to use it in the delightful way of thankful recollection.

Miss Catlett<sup>1</sup> must not think of any other lodging than we can without any inconvenience, as we shall with all possible pleasure, furnish her with. We can each of us say—that is, I can say it in Latin, and Mrs. Unwin in English—*Nihil tui à me alienum puto.* She shall have a great bed and a great room,<sup>2</sup> and we shall have the chamber we always occupy when we have company, and should certainly occupy, if she was not of the party. This state of the case leaves no room for the least objection ; we desire therefore that you will give our love to her, tell her we shall expect her, and that she will be but half as welcome to us if she sleeps any where else.

Having two more letters to write, I find myself obliged to shorten this ; so once more wishing you a good journey, and ourselves the happiness of receiving you in good health and spirits, I remain affectionately  
yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 5, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If the old adage be true that ‘he gives twice who gives speedily,’ it is equally true that he who not only uses expedition in giving, but gives more than was asked, gives thrice at least.

<sup>1</sup> Newton's adopted daughter.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's own bedroom—the large room on the first floor.

Such is the style in which Mr. Smith confers a favour. He has not only sent me franks to Johnson, but under another cover has added six to you.<sup>1</sup> These last, for aught that appears by your letter, he threw in of his own mere bounty. I beg that my share of thanks may not be wanting on this occasion; and that when you write to him next you will assure him of the sense I have of the obligation, which is the more flattering, as it includes a proof of his predilection in favour of the poems his franks are destined to enclose. May they not forfeit his good opinion hereafter, nor yours, to whom I hold myself indebted in the first place, and who have equally given me credit for their deservings! Your mother says that although there are passages in them containing opinions which will not be universally subscribed to, the world will at least allow — what my great modesty will not permit me to subjoin. I have the highest opinion of her judgment, and know, by having experienced the soundness of them, that her observations are always worthy of attention and regard. Yet, strange as it may seem, I do not feel the vanity of an author when she commends me; but I feel something better, a spur to my diligence and a cordial to my spirits, both together animating me to deserve, at least not to fall short of, her expectations. For I verily believe, if my dulness should earn me the character of a dunce, the censure would affect her more than me, not that I am insensible of the value of a good name either as a man or an author. Without an ambition to attain it, it is

<sup>1</sup> Every member of Parliament was entitled to send free ten letters every day. He had simply to write his name or title in the corner of the letter. The privilege of franking was abolished in 1840. Cowper is constantly asking his friends for franks.

absolutely unattainable under either of those descriptions. But my life having been in many respects a series of mortifications and disappointments, I am become less apprehensive and impulsive perhaps in some points than I should otherwise have been; and though I should be exquisitely sorry to disgrace my friends, could endure my own share of the affliction with a reasonable measure of tranquillity.

The lace pattern is given into the hands of one of the best artificers in Olney, with orders to proceed upon it immediately.

These seasonable showers have poured floods upon all the neighbouring parishes, but have passed us by. My garden languishes, and, what is worse, the fields too languish, and the upland grass is burnt. These discriminations are not fortuitous. But if they are providential, what do they import? I can only answer, as a friend of mine once answered a mathematical question in the schools—*Prorsus nescio*. Perhaps it is that men who will not believe what they cannot understand may learn the folly of their conduct, while their very senses are made to witness against them, and themselves in the course of Providence become the subjects of a thousand dispensations they cannot explain. But the end is never answered. The lesson is inculcated indeed frequently enough, but nobody learns it. Well. Instruction vouchsafed in vain is (I suppose) a debt to be accounted for hereafter. You must understand this to be a soliloquy. I wrote my thoughts without recollecting that I was writing a letter, and to you.

Our affectionate respects attend yourself and the ladies, nor are the little ones forgotten.—Yours  
rather in haste,

W.M. COWPER.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*June 24, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The letter you withheld so long, lest it should give me pain, gave me pleasure. Horace says the poets are a waspish race; and from my own experience of the temper of two or three, with whom I was formerly connected, I can readily subscribe to the character he gives them. But for my own part, I have never yet felt that excessive irritability, which some writers discover, when a friend, in the words of Pope—

'Just hints a fault, or hesitates dislike.'

Least of all would I give way to such an unseasonable ebullition, merely because a civil question is proposed to me with much gentleness, and by a man whose concern for my credit and character I verily believe to be sincere. I reply, therefore, not peevishly, but with a sense of the kindness of your intentions, that I hope you may make yourself very easy on a subject that I can perceive has occasioned you some solicitude. When I wrote the poem called *Truth*, by which is intended Religious Truth, it was indispensably necessary that I should set forth that doctrine which I know to be true, and that I should pass what I understood to be a just censure upon opinions and persuasions that differ from, or stand in direct opposition to it; because, though some errors may be innocent, and even religious errors are not always pernicious, yet in a case where the faith and hope of a Christian are concerned, they must necessarily be destructive; and because, neg-

lecting this, I should have betrayed my subject; either suppressing what, in my judgment, is of the last importance, or giving countenance, by a timid silence, to the very evils it was my design to combat. That you may understand me better, I will subjoin—that I wrote that poem on purpose to inculcate the eleemosynary character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of mercy, in the most absolute sense of the word, to the exclusion of all claims of merit on the part of the receiver; consequently to set the brand of invalidity upon the plea of works, and to discover, upon scriptural ground, the absurdity of that notion, which includes a solecism in the very terms of it, that man, by repentance and good works, may deserve the mercy of his Maker: I call it a solecism, because mercy deserved ceases to be mercy, and must take the name of justice. This is the opinion which I said, in my last, the world would not acquiesce in; but except this, I do not recollect that I have introduced a syllable into any of my pieces that they can possibly object to; and even this I have endeavoured to deliver from doctrinal dryness, by as many pretty things, in the way of trinket and plaything, as I could muster upon the subject. So that if I have rubbed their gums, I have taken care to do it with a coral, and even that coral embellished by the ribband to which it is tied, and recommended by the tinkling of all the bells I could contrive to annex to it.

You need not trouble yourself to call on Johnson; being perfectly acquainted with the progress of the business, I am able to satisfy your curiosity myself. The post before the last I returned to him the second sheet of *Table Talk*, which he had sent me for cor-

rection, and which stands foremost in the volume. The delay has enabled me to add a piece of considerable length, which, but for the delay, would not have made its appearance upon this occasion; it answers to the name of *Hope*.

Your Independent gardener's excuses for his breach of the Sabbath are in my mind paltry, and all put together, amount to no more than this—that I choose to turn a penny when I can, and am determined that the sanctity of the day shall never interfere with a concern of so much greater importance. The barber and hair-dresser<sup>1</sup> who officiates for me would not wait upon the King himself on a Sunday, though he could easily make apologies more plausible than any adduced by the old man you mention, were he disposed to trespass against his duty and his conscience.

I remember a line in the *Odyssey*, which, literally translated, imports that there is nothing in the world more impudent than the belly. But had Homer met with an instance of modesty like yours, he would either have suppressed that observation, or at least have qualified it with an exception. I hope that, for the future, Mrs. Unwin will never suffer you to go to London without putting some victuals in your pocket; for what a strange article would it make in a newspaper, that a tall, well-dressed gentleman, by his appearance a clergyman, and with a purse of gold in his pocket, was found starved to death in the street! How would it puzzle conjecture to account for such a phenomenon! Some would suppose that

<sup>1</sup> William Wilson, who refused to dress Lady Austen's hair on Sundays, so that that lady had it dressed on the Saturday, and rumour said sometimes sat up all night to prevent its disarrangement.

you had been kidnapped, like Betty Canning, of hungry memory; others would say, the gentleman was a Methodist, and had practised a rigorous self-denial, which had unhappily proved too hard for his constitution; but I will venture to say that nobody would divine the real cause, or suspect for a moment that your modesty had occasioned the tragedy in question. By the way, is it not possible that the sparseness and slenderness of your person may be owing to the same cause? for surely it is reasonable to suspect that the bashfulness which could prevail against you, on so trying an occasion, may be equally prevalent on others. I remember having been told by Colman that when he once dined with Garrick, he repeatedly pressed him to eat more of a certain dish that he was known to be particularly fond of; Colman as often refused, and at last declared he could not: 'But could not you,' says Garrick, 'if you was in a dark closet by yourself?' The same question might perhaps be put to you, with as much, or more propriety; and therefore I recommend it to you, either to furnish yourself with a little more assurance, or always to eat in the dark.

We sympathise with Mrs. Unwin; and if it will be any comfort to her to know it, can assure her that a lady in our neighbourhood is always, on such occasions, the most miserable of all things, and yet escapes with great facility through all the dangers of her state.

Our love attends yourself, the ladies and the children, with congratulations on the amendment of John's health, which we hope by this time is perfectly restored.—Yours, *ut semper,*      W. C.

## X TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

MY DEAR WILLIAM,<sup>1</sup>—For the sound's sake. I thought it a tribute due to my old friend,<sup>2</sup> who well deserved that what has been learnedly spoken of him in Latin should be spoken of him in plain English also, to translate the pretty and elegant exercise you sent me. If you choose to do so, you may send my attempt to the printer; for though the scissors have passed through the line, I can spell out his request for a version. I am very busy writing what will probably be yet added to my volume now in the press. It is an affair of some length called *Charity*. I have been transcribing a good deal this morning, and should indeed have preferred the finishing to the beginning of a letter just at the present moment, being rather weary, and not in the best spirits.

We were truly concerned at your relation of the danger you have escaped, and consequently felt a proportionable pleasure at the account of your recovery. I suppose your uncle's delicacy revolted at the thought of a chop-house; but except one coffee-house called Chapman's, in Mayfair, I never knew a house of that denomination that was fit for a gentleman to dine in. I do not wonder that he was peevish, and that being so he became more so; it is a temper that provides fuel for itself, either by disconcerting the temper of others, or provoking neglect and as contemptuous indifference in return. Had my poor schoolmaster<sup>2</sup> above mentioned been as irascible as somebody, his memory must have

<sup>1</sup> Cowper had first written the word 'friend,' which, after finishing the sentence, he crossed out in favour of 'William,' and added 'For the sound's sake.'

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lloyd.

wanted the garland that gratitude has tied around it; and if that somebody had been a pedagogue at St. Peter's,<sup>1</sup> he would have had three hundred wasps about his ears, that in spite of his authority would have contrived to tease him out of his senses. Where there is but little religion, philosophy may have its use; but where there is neither, and the bilious humour predominates, woe to the unhappy man who knows no end of what he suffers in himself, or what he inflicts upon others.

I shall be much obliged by six more franks, and by the very first opportunity. Johnson is printing away, and I am writing away as if it was a race between us. The volume will be larger in consequence than was at first proposed by near a third of its dimensions. And whether, the six I now request expended, my occasions will be completely satisfied is doubtful, I rather imagine not.

So far from thinking egotisms tedious, I think a letter good for nothing without them. To hear *from* a friend is little, unless I hear *of* him at the same time. His sentiments may be just, but his feelings and his welfare are most to the purpose.

I will not trouble you for the poets at present, though I thank you for the offer. Perhaps next winter I may be glad of them.

Our joint love to you all is all that I can add, except that I am yours.                           WM. COWPER.

N.B.—I mean six to me and six to Johnson, as before.

<sup>1</sup> St. Peter's College is still the official name for Westminster School, the College being associated with the Abbey Church of St. Peter's, Westminster, *i.e.* Westminster Abbey. 'St. Peter's' is written on all the school magazines and at the head of the examination papers. In ordinary conversation the masters at Westminster still speak of 'St. Peter's.'

Looking out of his window one day early in July 1781, Cowper noticed two ladies enter the draper's shop opposite, one of whom he recognised as Mrs. Jones, wife of the Rev. Thomas Jones, curate of Clifton Reynes, a neighbouring village. Being struck with the appearance of the stranger, he inquired her name, and learnt that she was Lady Austen, widow of Sir Robert Austen, Baronet, and sister of Mrs. Jones. The two ladies were invited to tea by Mrs. Unwin, and thus sprang up that intimacy which had such important results. To Lady Austen's vivacity and suggestiveness we owe, besides many a minor flight, *John Gilpin* and *The Task*. A threefold cord, said Cowper, is not soon broken. That of which he, Mrs. Unwin, and Lady Austen formed the strands remained intact just three years.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 7, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mr. Old brought us the acceptable news of your safe arrival. My sensations at your departure<sup>1</sup> were far from pleasant, and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when you first took leave of Olney. When we shall meet again, and in what circumstances, or whether we shall meet or not, is an article to be found no where but in that volume of Providence which belongs to the current year, and will not be understood till it is accomplished. This I know, that your visit was most agreeable here. It was so even to me, who, though I live in the midst of many agreeables, am but little sensible of their charms. But when you came, I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that if I could con-

<sup>1</sup> Newton had visited Olney in June.

tribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert.

Lady Austen, waving all forms, has paid us the first visit; and not content with showing us that proof of her respect, made handsome apologies for her intrusion. We returned the visit yesterday. She is a lively, agreeable woman; has seen much of the world, and accounts it a great simpleton, as it is. She laughs and makes laugh, and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labour at it.

I had rather submit to chastisement now than be obliged to undergo it hereafter. If Johnson, therefore, will mark with a marginal Q those lines that he or his object to as not sufficiently finished, I will willingly retouch them, or give a reason for my refusal. I shall moreover think myself obliged by any hints of that sort, as I do already to somebody, who, by running here and there two or three paragraphs into one, has very much improved the arrangement of my matter. I am apt, I know, to fritter it into too many pieces, and, by doing so, to disturb that order to which all writings must owe their perspicuity, at least in a considerable measure. With all that carefulness of revisal I have exercised upon the sheets as they have been transmitted to me, I have been guilty of an oversight, and have suffered a great fault to escape me, which I shall be glad to correct if not too late.

In the *Progress of Error*, a part of the Young Squire's apparatus, before he yet enters upon his travels, is said to be

— Memorandum-book to minute down  
The several posts, and where the chaise broke down.

Here, the reviewers would say, is not only ‘down,’ but ‘down derry down’ into the bargain, the word being made to rhyme to itself. This never occurred to me till last night, just as I was stepping into bed. I should be glad, however, to alter it thus—

With memorandum book for every town,  
And every inn, and where the chaise broke down.

I have advanced so far in *Charity*, that I have ventured to give Johnson notice of it, and his option whether he will print it now or hereafter. I rather wish he may choose the present time, because it will be a proper sequel to *Hope*, and because I am willing to think it will embellish the collection. Mrs. Unwin purposes to send a couple of ducks by next Friday’s diligence, when I imagine this last production will have a place in the basket.

Whoever means to take my phiz will find himself sorely perplexed in seeking for a fit occasion. That I shall not give him one is certain; and if he steals one, he must be as cunning and quick-sighted a thief as Autolycus himself. His best course will be to draw a face, and call it mine, at a venture. They who have not seen me these twenty years will say, It may possibly be a striking likeness now, though it bears no resemblance to what he was: time makes great alterations. They who know me better will say perhaps, Though it is not perfectly the thing, yet there is somewhat of the cast of his countenance. If the nose was a little longer, and the chin a little shorter, the eyes a little smaller, and the forehead a little more protuberant, it would be just the man. And thus, without seeing me at all, the artist may represent me to the public eye, with as much exactness as yours has bestowed upon you, though,

I suppose, the original was full in his view when he made the attempt.

We are both as well as when you left us. Our hearty affections wait upon yourself and Mrs. Newton, not forgetting Euphrosyne,<sup>1</sup> the laughing lady.—Yours, my dear Sir,                   Wm. COWPER.

### THE ‘HOP O’ MY THUMB’ LETTER

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 12, 1781.*

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there’s nobody knows whether what I have got be verse or not: by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme; but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before? The thought did occur to me and to her, as Madam and I did walk, not fly, over hills and dales, with spreading sails, before it was dark, to Weston Park.

The news at *Oney*<sup>2</sup> is little or none-y, but such as it is I send it, viz. Poor Mr. Peace cannot yet cease, addling his head with what you said, and has left parish church quite in the lurch, having almost swore to go there no more.

Page<sup>3</sup> and his wife, that made such a strife, we met them twain in Dag Lane;<sup>4</sup> we gave them the wall, and that was all. For Mr. Scott, we have seen him not, except as he pass’d, in a wonderful

<sup>1</sup> No doubt, Miss Catlett. See letter of Jan. 13, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Olney has the l silent. It rhymes with pony.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Mr. Page, formerly curate of Olney.

<sup>4</sup> Dagnell Street, now Weston Road.

haste, to see a friend in Silver End. Mrs. Jones proposes, ere July closes, that she and her sister, and her Jones Mister,<sup>1</sup> and we that are here, our course shall steer, to dine in the Spinnie; but for a guinea, if the weather should hold, so hot and so cold, we had better by far stay where we are. For the grass there grows, while nobody mows (which is very wrong), so rank and long, that so to speak, 'tis at least a week, if it happens to rain, ere it dries again.

I have writ *Charity*, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good; and if the reviewer should say, 'To be sure, the gentleman's Muse wears Methodist shoes; you may know by her pace, and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard, for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoidening play, of the modern day; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan, to catch if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production, on a new construction. She has baited her trap in hopes to snap all that may come, with a sugar-plum.—His opinion in this will not be amiss; 'tis what I intend, my principal end; and if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid, for all I have said, and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence, to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas Jones, curate of Clifton Reynes. He was one of the six students expelled from Oxford, 11th March 1768, for praying and expounding the Scriptures in private houses. He married Lady Austen's sister Martha.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor, laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in, you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in, now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe or string, or any such thing; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I have penn'd; which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me.

W. C.

*P.S.*—When I concluded, doubtless you did think me right, as well you might, in saying what I said of Scott; and then it was true, but now it is due, to him to note, that since I wrote, himself and he has visited we.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*July 22, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am sensible of your difficulties in finding opportunities to write; and therefore, though always desirous and sometimes impatient to hear from you, am never peevish when I am disappointed. We thank you for the letters. The noble Divine is sensible though angry, and the Divine Captain always consistent with Himself. What you relate of the unhappy Epsomite is truly shocking; when men cannot find the true remedy they often have recourse to one that is worse than the disease,

and a worse than he has found, if the fact be such, it is not in the power of quackery to recommend. How wonderful! that a man can suppose himself employed under God's blessing as a discoverer of truth, while he himself is entangled in the worst of errors, a practical departure from it. If a traveller were lost in a labyrinth and in the course of his wanderings should stumble upon a vessel of intoxicating liquor, he could hardly do worse than drink it, or more effectually insure his own destruction.

Johnson having begun to print, has given me some sort of security for his perseverance; else, the tardiness of his operations would almost tempt me to despair of the end. He has, indeed, time enough before him; but that very circumstance is sometimes a snare, and gives occasion to delays that cannot be remedied. Witness the hare in the fable, who fell asleep in the midst of the race, and waked not till the tortoise had won the prize.

Taking it for granted that the new marriage bill would pass, I took occasion, in the Address to Liberty,<sup>1</sup> to celebrate the joyful æra; but in doing so afforded another proof that poets are not always prophets, for the House of Lords have thrown it out. I am, however, provided with four lines to fill up the gap, which I suppose it will be time enough to insert when the copy is sent down. I am in the middle of an affair called *Conversation*, which, as *Table Talk* serves in the present volume by way of introductory fiddle to the band that follows, I design shall perform the same office in a second.

Sic brevi fortis jaculamur ævo.

<sup>1</sup> In *Table Talk*.

Our excursion to the Spinnie, which I mentioned in the 'Hop o' My Thumb' lines I sent you, took place yesterday. The weather was just such as it would have been if we had had the choice of it; perhaps better; for of all things in the world, we find it sometimes most difficult to please ourselves. We dined in the root-house.<sup>1</sup> Our great wheelbarrow, which may be called a first rate in its kind, conveyed all our stores, and afterwards, with the assistance of a board laid over it, made us a very good table. We set off at one, and were at home again soon after eight. I never made one in a party of pleasure that answered so well. We separated before we grew weary of each other, which is a happiness seldom enjoyed upon such occasions; we were seven<sup>2</sup> in company, including Hannah,<sup>3</sup> who, though highly delighted with her jaunt, was not at all more pleased than her elders. She is as much delighted to-day with the acquisition of a sister born last night, but whether the rest of that noble family will have equal cause to rejoice in the event is uncertain. Should she be followed by a troop, unless they practise Dean Swift's recommended method for the maintenance of the poor, it is not easy to say where they will find victuals, —certainly not at Olney.

You cannot always find time to write, and I cannot always write a great deal; not for want of time, but for want of something equally requisite;

<sup>1</sup> 'The moss-house' in the 'First Spinnie.'

<sup>2</sup> Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, Rev. T. Jones, Mrs. Jones, Lady Austen, Hannah, 'The Lackey.'

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Willson, Cowper's protégée. She was the daughter of Dick Coleman's wife by a former husband. Olney people called her 'Miss Hannah.' See letter 5th May 1794.

perhaps materials, perhaps spirits, or perhaps more frequently for want of ability to overcome an indolence that I have sometimes heard even you complain of.

I beg you will remember me to Mrs. Cowper. We are very sorry to hear of Mrs. Newton's indisposition. Mr. Wright, who called here three times before he could find me at home, informed me, the day before yesterday, that poor Lord Dartmouth grows worse. His account of him is indeed a most unfavourable one.

Thanks for the cocoa nuts and the slide. Mrs. Unwin joins love to both. The summer being so far advanced,

She and her sublimity  
Will do without dimity.

—Yours, my dear sir, and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 29, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having given the case you laid before me in your last all due consideration, I proceed to answer it; and in order to clear my way, shall, in the first place, set down my sense of those passages in Scripture which, on a hasty perusal, seem to clash with the opinion I am going to give—‘If a man smite one cheek, turn the other.’ ‘If he take thy cloak, let him take thy coat also.’ That is, I suppose, rather than on a vindictive principle avail yourself of that remedy the law allows you, in the way of retaliation, for that was the subject immediately under the discussion of the speaker. Nothing is so

contrary to the genius of the Gospel as the gratification of resentment and revenge; but I cannot easily persuade myself to think that the author of that dispensation could possibly advise his followers to consult their own peace at the expense of the peace of society, or inculcate a universal abstinence from the use of lawful remedies, to the encouragement of injury and oppression.

St. Paul again seems to condemn the practice of going to law, ‘ Why do ye not rather suffer wrong ? ’ etc. But if we look again, we shall find that a litigious temper had obtained, and was prevalent among the professors of the day. This he condemned, and with good reason; it was unseemly to the last degree that the disciples of the Prince of Peace should worry and vex each other with injurious treatment, and unnecessary disputes, to the scandal of their religion in the eyes of the heathen. But surely he did not mean any more than his Master, in the place above alluded to, that the most harmless members of society should receive no advantage of its laws, or should be the only persons in the world who should derive no benefit from those institutions, without which society cannot subsist. Neither of them could mean to throw down the pale of property, and to lay the Christian part of the world open, throughout all ages, to the incursions of unlimited violence and wrong.

By this time you are sufficiently aware that I think you have an indisputable right to recover at law what is so dishonestly withheld from you. The fellow, I suppose, has discernment enough to see a difference between you and the generality of the clergy, and cunning enough to conceive the purpose

of turning your meekness and forbearance to good account, and of coining them into hard cash, which he means to put in his pocket. But I would disappoint him, and show him that though a Christian is not to be quarrelsome, he is not to be crushed; and that though he is but a worm before God, he is not such a worm as every selfish unprincipled wretch may tread upon at his pleasure. You will find otherwise that he will soon cease to be singular in his villainy, and that here and there another will take the liberty to follow his example, till at last your living will be worth no more than your parishioners out of their great goodness will be pleased to allow you.

I lately heard a story from a lady, who has spent many years of her life in France, somewhat to the present purpose. An Abbé, universally esteemed for his piety, and especially for the meekness of his manners, had yet undesignedly given some offence to a shabby fellow in his parish. The man, concluding he might do as he pleased with so forgiving and gentle a character, struck him on one cheek, and bade him turn the other. The good man did so, and when he had received the two slaps, which he thought himself obliged to submit to, turned again, and beat him soundly. I do not wish to see you follow the French gentleman's example, but I believe nobody that has heard the story condemns him much for the spirit he showed upon the occasion.

I had the relation from Lady Austen, sister to Mrs. Jones, wife of the minister at Clifton. She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'nnight

we all dined together in the Spinnie—a most delightful retirement belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *Fête Champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock the servants, who had dined under a great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other, a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.—Yours, with our joint love,

W. C.

*Postscript.*—The lace is making, and the parties concerned are desired to take notice that it costs but threepence three-farthings per yard.

Mr. Smith,<sup>1</sup> with the same obliging readiness as before, has furnished me with the franks I wanted. When I publish, my book shall wait on him in acknowledgment of his kindness.

TO MRS. NEWTON

Aug. 1781.

DEAR MADAM,—Though much obliged to you for the favour of your last, and ready enough to acknowledge the debt, the present however is not a day in which I should have chosen to pay it. A dejection of

<sup>1</sup> The banker, afterwards first Lord Carrington.

mind, which perhaps may be removed by to-morrow, rather disqualifies me for writing—a business I would always perform in good spirits, because melancholy is catching, especially where there is much sympathy to assist the contagion. But certain poultry, which I understand are about to pay their respects to you, have advertised for an agreeable companion, and I find myself obliged to embrace the opportunity of going to town with them in that capacity.

I thank you for your little abridgment of my family's history. Like every thing that relates to the present world, in which there seems to be nearly an equal mixture of the lamentable and ridiculous, it affords both occasion to laugh and to cry. In this single instance of my uncle, I can see cause for both. He trembles upon the verge of fourscore: a white hat with a yellow lining is no indication of wisdom suitable to so great an age; he can go but one step farther in the road of impropriety, and direct his executor to bury him in it. He is a very little man, and had he lined his hat with pink instead of yellow, might have been gathered by a natural mistake for a mushroom, and sent off in a basket.

While the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. And, after all, what can fashion do for its most obsequious followers? It can ring the changes upon the same things, and it can do no more. Whether our hats be white or black, our caps high or low, whether we wear two watches or one, is of little consequence. There is indeed an appearance of variety; but the folly and vanity that dictates and adopts the change, are invariably the same. When the fashions of a particular period appear more reasonable than those of the preceding,

it is not because the world is grown more reasonable than it was ; but because, in a course of perpetual changes, some of them must sometimes happen to be for the better. Neither do I suppose the preposterous customs that prevail at present a proof of its greater folly. In a few years, perhaps next year, the fine gentleman will shut up his umbrella and give it to his sister, filling his hand with a crab-tree cudgel instead of it ; and when he has done so, will he be wiser than now ? By no means. The love of change will have betrayed him into a propriety, which in reality he has no taste for, all his merit on the occasion amounting to no more than this—that, being weary of one plaything, he has taken up another.

In a note I received from Johnson last week he expresses a wish that my pen may be still employed. Supposing it possible that he would yet be glad to swell the volume, I have given him an order to draw upon me for eight hundred lines, if he chooses it ; *Conversation*, a piece which I think I mentioned in my last to Mr. Newton, being finished. If Johnson sends for it, I shall transcribe it as soon as I can, and transmit it to Charles Square. Mr. Newton will take the trouble to forward it to the press. It is not a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise ; nor does it bear the least resemblance to *Table-Talk*, except that it is serio-comic, like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when He endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business ; and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober.

We felt ourselves not the less obliged to you for the cocoa-nuts, though they were good for nothing. They contained nothing but a putrid liquor, with a round white lump, which in taste and substance much resembled tallow, and was of the size of a small walnut. Nor am I the less indebted to your kindness for the fish, though none is yet come. Mrs. Unwin does not forget the eggs; but while the harvest continues puddings are in such request, that the farmers will not part with them.

Our joint love to both, and to Miss Catlett, if at home. Sir's letter, for which I thank him, shall have an answer as soon as possible.—Yours, dear madam, most affectionately,

W. C.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Aug. 16, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I might date my letter from the greenhouse, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded, by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep, where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children, not to mention the exchange of a sweet-smelling garden, for the putrid exhalations of Silver End. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many

other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing ; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage,<sup>1</sup> which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local ; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel ; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind ; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety.

<sup>1</sup> 'The Peasant's Nest' (now a farmhouse), referred to in *The Task*. It is about a mile from Olney.

He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance ; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification ; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this ; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic, too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them ; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and security for the continuance of them all.

Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation : the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing, make the subject of my letters to you.

Johnson sent me lately a sort of apology for his printer's negligence, with his promise of greater diligence for the future. There was need enough of both. I have received but one sheet since you left us. Still, indeed, I see that there is time enough before us ; but I see likewise that no length of time can be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that does not go forward. I know not yet whether he will add *Conversation* to those poems already in his hands, nor do I care much. No man ever wrote

such quantities of verse as I have written this last year, with so much indifference about the event, or rather, with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved, the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely to attain the end of usefulness; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once have had; my labour must go unrewarded; and, as Mr. Raban<sup>1</sup> once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in, and not I.

I have left myself no room for politics, which I thought, when I began, would have been my principal theme.

Mr. Symonds's letters<sup>2</sup> certainly are not here. Our servants never touch a paper without leave, and are so observant of our injunction in this particular, that unless I burn the covers of the news, they accumulate till they make a litter.—Yours, my dear Sir,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON (*Written in the Greenhouse*)

Aug. 21, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You wish you could employ your time to better purpose, yet are never idle. In all that you say or do; whether you are alone, or

<sup>1</sup> The carpenter-minister. See p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Joshua Symonds, minister of Bunyan Meeting, Bedford, was a friend of Newton. Many letters of Newton to Mr. Symonds are preserved in the Museum at Olney.

pay visits, or receive them ; whether you think or write, or walk or sit still ; the state of your mind is such as discovers even to yourself, in spite of all its wanderings, that there is a principle at bottom whose determined tendency is towards the best things. I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pesters you without ceasing ; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace, with the riot-act in his hand, ready to read it, and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants. They turn too upon spiritual subjects ; but the tallest fellow and the loudest among them all is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te ; periisti !*<sup>1</sup> You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one ; but however earnestly invited, is coy, and keeps at a distance. Yet with all this distressing gloom upon my mind, I experience, as you do, the slipperiness of the present hour, and the rapidity with which time escapes me. Every thing around us, and every thing that befalls us, constitutes a variety, which, whether agreeable or otherwise, has still a thievish propensity, and steals from us days, months, and years, with such unparalleled address, that even while we say they are here, they are gone. From infancy to manhood is rather a tedious period, chiefly, I suppose, because at that time we act under the control of others, and are not suffered to have a will of our own. But thence downward into the

<sup>1</sup> It is all over with thee ; thou hast perished.

vale of years, is such a declivity, that we have just an opportunity to reflect upon the steepness of it, and then find ourselves at the bottom.

Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time, at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the greenhouse, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building<sup>1</sup> which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman,<sup>2</sup> his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But

<sup>1</sup> The eastern part, now called 'Dick Coleman's House.'

<sup>2</sup> Cowper's ne'er-do-well protégé.

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these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene, and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted.

Cocoa-nut naught,  
Fish too dear,  
None must be bought  
For us that are here.

No lobster on earth,  
That ever I saw,  
To me would be worth  
Sixpence a claw.

So, dear madam, wait  
Till fish can be got  
At a reas'nable rate  
Whether lobster or not;

Till the French and the Dutch  
Have quitted the seas,  
And then send as much  
And as oft as you please.

Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Aug. 25, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—By Johnson's last note (for I have received a packet from him since I wrote last to you) I am ready to suspect that you have seen him, and endeavoured to quicken his proceedings. His assurance of greater expedition leads me to think so. I know little of booksellers and printers, but have heard from others that they are the most

dilatory of all people; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome: but am obliged to you nevertheless for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur that you have given him. He chooses to add *Conversation* to the rest, and says he will give me notice when he is ready for it; but I shall send it to *you* by the first opportune conveyance, and beg you to deliver it over to him. He wishes me not to be afraid of making the volume too large; by which expression I suppose he means, that if I had still another piece, there would be room for it. At present I have not, but am in the way to produce another, *faveat modò Musa*. I have already begun and proceeded a little way in a poem called *Retirement*. My view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves, by a life of pleasure, for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed and religiously improved. But all this is, at present, in embryo. I generally despair of my progress when I begin; but if, like my travelling 'squire, I should kindle as I go, this likewise may make a part of the volume, for I have time enough before me.

Susan Roberts has been supposed dying for some time, was speechless for a week, then grew better, was seized with violent convulsions, and is again grown better. Mr. Scott is recovered, though when

we paid him our last morning visit we found him a little disconcerted by the brutality and profaneness of a drunken fellow whom he had just been yoking with a pregnant lady. The church was filled with idle folks upon the occasion, who could not be persuaded to behave with any degree of decency or decorum, and the wretch himself was as insolent as ignorance and strong drink could make him.

I forgot to mention that Johnson uses the discretion my poetship has allowed him, with much discernment. He has suggested several alterations, or rather marked several defective passages, which I have corrected, much to the advantage of the poems. In the last sheet he sent me, he noted three such, all which I have reduced into better order. In the foregoing sheet, I assented to his criticisms in some instances, and chose to abide by the original expression in others. Thus we jog on together comfortably enough; and perhaps it would be as well for authors in general, if their booksellers, when men of some taste, were allowed, though not to tinker the work themselves, yet to point out the flaws, and humbly to recommend an improvement.

The embargo I would have laid upon the present of fish reached you, I find, too late, and we are now to return our thanks for three pair of fine soles, on which we feasted noon and night: but I beg that said embargo may have its effect in future; and that Mrs. Newton will not think of sending more till the price is fallen. Once more love, thanks, and adieu!  
—Yours,

Wm. COWPER.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*August 25, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We rejoice with you sincerely in the birth of another son, and in the prospect you have of Mrs. Unwin's recovery; may your three children, and the next three, when they shall make their appearance, prove so many blessings to their parents, and make you wish that you had twice the number. But what made you expect daily that you should hear from me? Letter for letter is the law of all correspondence whatsoever; and because I wrote last, I have indulged myself for some time in expectation of a sheet from you. Not that I govern myself entirely by the punctilio of reciprocation; but having been pretty much occupied of late, I was not sorry to find myself at liberty to exercise my discretion, and furnished with a good excuse if I chose to be silent.

I expected, as you remember, to have been published last spring, and was disappointed. The delay has afforded me an opportunity to increase the quantity of my publication by about a third; and if my muse has not forsaken me, which I rather suspect to be the case, may possibly yet add to it. I have a subject in hand, which promises me a great abundance of poetical matter, but which, for want of a something I am not able to describe, I cannot at present proceed with. The name of it is *Retirement*, and my purpose, to recommend the proper improvement of it, to set forth the requisites for that end, and to enlarge upon the happiness of that state of life, when managed as it ought to be. In the course of my journey through this ample theme, I should wish to

touch upon the characters, the deficiencies, and the mistakes of thousands, who enter on a scene of retirement, unqualified for it in every respect, and with such designs as have no tendency to promote either their own happiness or that of others. But as I have told you before, there are times when I am no more a poet than I am a mathematician ; and when such a time occurs, I always think it better to give up the point, than to labour it in vain. I shall yet again be obliged to trouble you for franks ; the addition of three thousand lines, or near that number, having occasioned a demand which I did not always foresee : but your obliging friend, and your obliging self, having allowed me the liberty of application, I make it without apology.

The solitude, or rather the duality of our condition at Olney, seems drawing to a conclusion. You have not forgot, perhaps, that the building we inhabit consists of two mansions. And because you have only seen the inside of that part of it which is in our occupation, I therefore inform you, that the other end of it is by far the most superb, as well as the most commodious. Lady Austen has seen it, has set her heart upon it, is going to fit it up and furnish it ; and if she can get rid of the remaining two years of the lease of her London house, will probably enter upon it in a twelvemonth. You will be pleased with this intelligence, because I have already told you, that she is a woman perfectly well bred, sensible, and in every respect agreeable ; and, above all, because she loves your mother dearly. It has in my eyes (and I doubt not it will have the same in yours) strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy

of the appellation, comes, recommended by a variety of considerations, to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came, we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other.

Your mother sends her warm affections, and welcomes into the world the new-born William.—Yours,  
my dear friend,

W. C.

*P.S.*—No stock-buckle is wanted at present, but you are desired to order the shopman to send the handkerchiefs to Mr. Newton's, they having frequent opportunities to send to Olney.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Sept. 9, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am not willing to let the

post set off without me, though I have nothing material to put into his bag. I am writing in the greenhouse, where my myrtles, ranged before the windows, make the most agreeable blind imaginable; where I am undisturbed by noise, and where I see none but pleasing objects. The situation is as favourable to my purpose as I could wish; but the state of my mind is not so, and the deficiencies I feel there are not to be remedied by the stillness of my retirement, or the beauty of the scene before me. I believe it is in part owing to the excessive heat of the weather that I find myself so much at a loss when I attempt either verse or prose: my animal spirits are depressed, and dulness is the consequence. That dulness, however, is all at your service; and the portion of it that is necessary to fill up the present epistle, I send you without the least reluctance.

I am sorry to find that the censure I have passed upon Occiduus<sup>1</sup> is even better founded than I supposed. Lady Austen has been at his sabbatical concerts, which, it seems, are composed of song-tunes and psalm-tunes indiscriminately; music without words—and I suppose one may say, consequently, without devotion. On a certain occasion, when her niece was sitting at her side, she asked his opinion concerning the lawfulness of such amusements as are to be found at Vauxhall or Ranelagh—meaning only to draw from him a sentence of disapprobation, that Miss Green might be the better

<sup>1</sup> Occiduus (Latin = Western) is the pastor of renown who, ‘when he had prayed and preached the Sabbath down,’ used to conclude the day ‘with wire and catgut.’ Probably a punning nickname for (Charles) Wesley. See *Progress of Error*, Globe ed. p. 66.

reconciled to the restraint under which she was held, when she found it warranted by the judgment of so famous a divine. But she was disappointed : he accounted them innocent, and recommended them as useful. Curiosity, he said, was natural to young persons ; and it was wrong to deny them a gratification which they might be indulged in with the greatest safety ; because the denial being unreasonable, the desire of it would still subsist. It was but a walk, and a walk was as harmless in one place as another, with other arguments of a similar import, which might have proceeded with more grace, at least with less offence, from the lips of a sensual layman. He seems, together with others of our acquaintance, to have suffered considerably in his spiritual character by his attachment to music. The lawfulness of it, when used with moderation, and in its proper place, is unquestionable ; but I believe that wine itself, though a man be guilty of habitual intoxication, does not more debauch and befool the natural understanding, than music, always music, music in season and out of season, weakens and destroys the spiritual discernment. If it is not used with an unfeigned reference to the worship of God, and with a design to assist the soul in the performance of it, which cannot be the case when it is the only occupation, it degenerates into a sensual delight, and becomes a most powerful advocate for the admission of other pleasures, grosser perhaps in degree, but in their kind the same.

Mr. Monk, though a simple, honest, good man—such, at least, he appears to us—is not likely to give general satisfaction. He preaches the truth, it seems, but not the whole truth ; and a certain

member of that church, who signed the letter of invitation, which was conceived in terms sufficiently encouraging, is likely to prove one of his most strenuous opposers. The little man, however, has an independent fortune, and has nothing to do but to trundle himself away to some other place, where he may find hearers, neither so nice nor so wise as we are at Olney.—Yours, my dear sir, with our united love,

W. C.

## TO MRS. NEWTON

Sept. 16, 1781.

A NOBLE theme demands a noble verse,  
In such I thank you for your fine oysters.  
The barrel was magnificently large,  
But being sent to Olney at free charge,  
Was not inserted in the driver's list,  
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or miss'd ;  
For when the messenger whom we dispatch'd  
Enquir'd for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd,  
Denying that his waggon or his wain  
Did any such commodity contain.  
In consequence of which, your welcome boon  
Did not arrive till yesterday at noon,  
In consequence of which some chanced to die,  
And some, though very sweet, were very dry.  
Now Madam says (and what she says must still  
Deserve attention, say she what she will),  
That what we call the Diligence, be-case  
It goes to London with a swifter pace,  
Would better suit the carriage of your gift,  
Returning downward with a pace as swift ;

And therefore recommends it with this aim—  
To save at least three days,—the price the same ;  
For though it will not carry or convey  
For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may,  
For oysters bred upon the salt sea shore,  
Pack'd in a barrel, they will charge no more.

News have I none that I can deign to write,  
Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night ;  
And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,  
Caught in the first beginning of the shower ;  
But walking, running, and with much ado,  
Got home—just time enough to be wet through.  
Yet both are well, and wond'rous to be told,  
Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold ;  
And wishing just the same good hap to you,  
We say, good madam, and good sir, Adieu !

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

Sept. 16, 1781.

SIR,—By your not mentioning it, I suppose you have not yet received *Conversation* ; shall be glad to know it when you have. *Retirement* is grown to about five hundred lines, so that I begin to hope I shall reach the end of it.

‘Cry aloud,’ etc.

Though the verse has rather an unusual run, I chose to begin it in that manner for the sake of animation, and am not able to alter it without flattening its energy quite away.

‘Providence adverse,’ etc.

The reduplication of those words was a point I rather laboured for the sake of emphasis, and the transposition of them strikes me as artful, and as having an agreeable effect upon the ear.

'Cured of golden calves,' etc.

The expression has a figurative boldness in it, which appears to me poetical.

All your other marks have been attended to, and I thank you for them.—I am, sir, Your most obedient,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I return your preface, with many thanks for so affectionate an introduction to the public. I have observed nothing that in my judgment required alteration, except a single sentence in the first paragraph, which I have not obliterated, that you may restore it if you please, by obliterating my interlineation. My reason for proposing an amendment of it was, that your meaning did not strike me, which therefore I have endeavoured to make more obvious. The rest is what I would wish it to be. You say, indeed, more in my commendation, than I can modestly say of myself: but something will be allowed to the partiality of friendship, on so interesting an occasion.

I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen

to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed, like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously ; but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability ; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the *Dunciad* ; but on being advised to read before he judged him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can ; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased ; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called *Creation*, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country), and my success will be secured.

I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been writing, and at present I am not much

in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company ; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden ; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore ; and remember that if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne) has been warm in the praise of it.

*Retirement grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors.* Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning : now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen. It consists at present, I suppose, of between six and seven hundred ; so that there are hopes of an end, and I dare say Johnson will give me time enough to finish it.

I nothing add but this—that *still I am*  
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Sept. 26, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I may, I suppose, congratulate you on your safe arrival at Brighthelmstone ; and am the better pleased with your design to close the summer there, because I am acquainted with the

place, and, by the assistance of fancy, can without much difficulty join myself to the party, and partake with you in your amusements and excursions. It happened, singularly enough, that just before I received your last, in which you apprise me of your intended journey, I had been writing upon the subject, having found occasion towards the close of my last poem, called *Retirement*, to take some notice of the modern passion for seaside entertainments, and to direct to the means by which they might be made useful as well as agreeable. I think with you, that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment, when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion, and even without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves would preach to me, and that in the midst of dissipation I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakespeare's characters says,— ‘I am never merry when I hear sweet music.’ The same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him, I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy not unpleasing nor without its use. So much for Signor Netuno.

Lady Austen goes to London this day se'nnight. We have told her that you shall visit her; which is an enterprise you may engage in with the more alacrity, because as she loves every thing that has

any connection with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. Add to this, that your own personal recommendations are by no means small, or such as a woman of her fine taste and discernment can possibly overlook. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most, and the most harmless vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her; and when I hear you have a journey to town in contemplation, I will send you her address.

Your mother is well, and joins with me in wishing that you may spend your time agreeably upon the coast of Sussex.

I beg you will trouble Mr. Smith with my respectful compliments, not because I have any right to intrude them upon him, but because he has done me favours of which I am sensible, and wish to appear so.—Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

Oct. 1, 1781.

SIR,—I expect to finish *Retirement* in a day or two, and as soon as transcribed I shall forward it to

Mr. Newton. This addition, I think, will swell the volume to a respectable size, consisting, as I guess, of between seven and eight hundred lines. I may now grant myself a respite, and watch the success of the present undertaking, determining myself by the event, whether to resume my occupation as an author or drop it for ever.—I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*Oct. 3, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your draft is worded for twenty pounds, and figured for twenty-one. I thought it more likely the mistake should be made in the figures than in the words, and have sent you a receipt accordingly. I am obliged to you for it, and no less bound to acknowledge your kindness in thinking for a man so little accustomed to think for himself. The result of my deliberations on the subject proposed is, that it will be better, on many accounts, to sell the chambers, and to deposit the money in the Funds. Public credit wants a lift, and I would willingly show my readiness to afford it one at so critical a juncture. If you can sell Morgan at the same time, so as to turn him to any account, you have my free leave to do it. It has been a dry summer, and frogs may possibly be scarce, and fetch a good price; though how his frogship has attained to the honour of that appellation, at this distance from the scene of his activity, I am not able to conjecture.

I hope you have had a pleasant vacation, and have laid in a fresh stock of health and spirits for the

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business of the approaching winter. As for me, I have just finished my last piece called *Retirement*; which, as soon as it is fit to appear in public, shall, together with all the rest of its fraternity, lay itself at your feet.

My affectionate respects attend Mrs. Hill and yourself.—Yours truly,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Oct. 4, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I generally write the day before the post, but yesterday had no opportunity, being obliged to employ myself in settling my greenhouse for the winter. I am now writing before breakfast, that I may avail myself of every inch of time for the purpose. N.B.—An expression a critic would quarrel with, and call it by some hard name, signifying a jumble of ideas, and an unnatural match between time and space.

I am glad to be undeceived respecting the opinion I had been erroneously led into on the subject of Johnson's criticism on Watts. Nothing can be more judicious, or more characteristic of a distinguishing taste, than his observations upon that writer; though I think him a little mistaken in his notion, that divine subjects have never been poetically treated with success. A little more Christian knowledge and experience would perhaps enable him to discover excellent poetry, upon spiritual themes, in the aforesaid little Doctor. I perfectly acquiesce in the propriety of sending Johnson a copy of my productions; and I think it would be well to send it in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such an

one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration.

I forgot to tell you in my last, that I was well pleased with your proposed appearance in the title-page under the name of the editor. I do not care under how many names you appear in a book that calls me its author. In my last piece, which I finished the day before yesterday, I have told the public that I live upon the banks of the Ouse: that public is a great simpleton if it does not know that you live in London; it will consequently know that I had need of the assistance of some friend in town, and that I could have recourse to nobody with more propriety than yourself. I shall transcribe and submit to your approbation as fast as possible. I have now, I think, finished my volume; indeed I am almost weary of composing, having spent a year in doing nothing else. I reckon my volume will consist of about eight thousand lines. The season of despatch which Johnson has so often promised is not yet arrived; a fortnight, and sometimes three weeks elapse before I am supplied with a new sheet; the next brings us into the middle of Hope, which I account the middle of the volume, consequently, unless he proceeds with more celerity, the publishing moment will escape us this year, as it did the last: for his own sake, however, I should suppose he will catch it if he can, and be ready to exhibit by the meeting of Parliament after the Christmas recess.

Mrs. Unwin is well, and sends her love. Our thanks are due for a fine piece of skait and some prawns, both as fresh as when they took leave of

their native element. We heartily wish Mrs. Newton better than *pretty* well, and the recovery of all the invalids in your family.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*October 6, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—What a world are you daily conversant with, which I have not seen these twenty years, and shall never see again! The arts of dissipation (I suppose) are no where practised with more refinement or success than at the place of your present residence. By your account of it, it seems to be just what it was when I visited it, a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping; the rooms perhaps more magnificent, because the proprietors are grown richer; but the manners and occupations of the company just the same. Though my life has long been like that of a recluse, I have not the temper of one, nor am I in the least an enemy to cheerfulness and good humour; but I cannot envy you your situation; I even feel myself constrained to prefer the silence of this nook, and the snug fireside in our own diminutive parlour, to all the splendour and gaiety of Brighton.

You ask me, how I feel on the occasion of my approaching publication. Perfectly at my ease. If I had not been pretty well assured beforehand that my tranquillity would be but little endangered by such a measure, I would never have engaged in it; for I cannot bear disturbance. I have had in view two principal objects; first, to amuse myself,—and

secondly, to compass that point in such a manner, that others might possibly be the better for my amusement. If I have succeeded, it will give me pleasure; but if I have failed, I shall not be mortified to the degree that might perhaps be expected. I remember an old adage (though not where it is to be found), '*bene vixit qui bene latuit*', and if I had recollect ed it at the right time, it should have been the motto to my book. By the way, it will make an excellent one for *Retirement*, if you can but tell me whom to quote for it. The critics cannot deprive me of the pleasure I have in reflecting, that so far as my leisure has been employed in writing for the public, it has been conscientiously employed, and with a view to their advantage. There is nothing agreeable, to be sure, in being chronicled for a dunce; but I believe that there lives not a man upon earth who would be less affected by it than myself. With all this indifference to fame, which you know me too well to suppose me capable of affecting, I have taken the utmost pains to deserve it. This may appear a mystery or a paradox in practice, but it is true. I considered that the taste of the day is refined, and delicate to excess, and that to disgust the delicacy of taste, by a slovenly inattention to it, would be to forfeit at once all hope of being useful; and for this reason, though I have written more verse this last year than perhaps any man in England, I have finished and polished, and touched, and retouched, with the utmost care. If after all I should be converted into waste paper, it may be my misfortune, but it will not be my fault. I shall bear it with the most perfect serenity.

I do not mean to give Quarne a copy: he is a

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good-natured little man, and crows exactly like a cock, but knows no more of verse than the cock he imitates.

Whoever supposes that Lady Austen's fortune is precarious, is mistaken. I can assure you, upon the ground of the most circumstantial and authentic information, that it is both genteel and perfectly safe.

Your mother adds her love, mine accompanies hers, and our united wishes for your prosperity in every respect desire to be of the party.—Yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Oct. 14, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I would not willingly deprive you of any comfort, and therefore would wish you to comfort yourself as much as you can with a notion that you are a more bountiful correspondent than I. You will give me leave in the meantime, however, to assert to myself a share in the same species of consolation, and to enjoy the flattering recollection that I have sometimes written three letters to your one. I never knew a poet, except myself, who was punctual in anything, or to be depended on for the due discharge of any duty, except what he thought he owed to the Muses. The moment a man takes it into his foolish head that he has what the world calls Genius, he gives himself a discharge from the servile drudgery of all friendly offices, and becomes good for nothing, except in the pursuit of his favourite employment. But I am not yet vain enough to think myself entitled to such self-conferred honours, and though

I have sent much poetry to the press, or, at least, what I hope my readers will account such, am still as desirous as ever of a place in your heart, and to take all opportunities to convince you that you have still the same in mine. My attention to my poetical function has, I confess, a little interfered of late with my other employments, and occasioned my writing less frequently than I should have otherwise done. But it is over, at least for the present, and I think for some time to come. I have transcribed *Retirement*, and send it. You will be so good as to forward it to Johnson, who will forward it, I suppose, to the public in his own time; but not very speedily, moving as he does. The post brought me a sheet this afternoon, but we have not yet reached the end of *Hope*.

Mr. Scott, I perceive by yours to him, has mentioned one of his troubles, but I believe not the principal one. The question whether he shall have an assistant at the great house in Mr. T. Raban is still a question, or, at least, a subject of discontent, between Mr. Scott and the people. In a *tête-à-tête* I had with this candidate for the chair, in the course of the last week, I told him my thoughts upon the subject plainly; advised him to change places, by the help of fancy, with Mr. Scott for a moment, and to ask himself how *he* would like a self-intruded deputy: advised him likewise by no means to address Mr. Scott any more upon the matter, for that he might be sure he would never consent to it; and concluded with telling him that if he persisted in his purpose of speaking to the people, the probable consequence would be that, sooner or later, Mr. Scott would be forced out of the parish, and the blame of

his expulsion would all light upon him. He heard, approved, and, I think the very next day, put all my good counsel to shame, at least a considerable part of it, by applying to Mr. Scott, in company with Mr. Perry, for his permission to speak at the Sunday evening lecture. Mr. Scott, as I had foretold, was immovable; but offered, for the satisfaction of his hearers, to preach three times to them on the Sabbath, which he could have done, Mr. Jones having kindly offered, though without their knowledge, to officiate for him at Weston. Mr. Raban answered, ‘That will not do, sir; it is not what the people wish; they want variety.’ Mr. Scott replied very wisely, ‘If they do, they must be content without it; it is not my duty to indulge that humour.’ This is the last intelligence I have had upon the subject. I received it not from Mr. Scott, but from an ear-witness.

I did not suspect, till the Reviewers told me so, that you are made up of artifice and design, and that your ambition is to delude your hearers. Well—I suppose they please themselves with the thought of having mortified you; but how much are they mistaken! They shot at you, and their arrow struck the Bible, recoiling, of course, upon themselves. My turn will come, for I think I shall hardly escape a threshing.—Yours, my dear, sir, and Mrs. Newton’s,

Wm. COWPER.

TO MRS. COWPER

*Oct. 19, 1781.*

MY DEAR COUSIN,—Your fear lest I should think you unworthy of my correspondence, on account of

your delay to answer, may change sides now, and more properly belongs to me. It is long since I received your last, and yet I believe I can say truly, that not a post has gone by me since the receipt of it that has not reminded me of the debt I owe you, for your obliging and unreserved communications both in prose and verse, especially for the latter, because I consider them as marks of your peculiar confidence. The truth is, I have been such a verse-maker myself, and so busy in preparing a volume for the press, which I imagine will make its appearance in the course of the winter, that I hardly had leisure to listen to the calls of any other engagement. It is, however, finished, and gone to the printer's, and I have nothing now to do with it but to correct the sheets as they are sent to me, and consign it over to the judgment of the public. It is a bold undertaking at this time of day, when so many writers of the greatest abilities have gone before, who seem to have anticipated every valuable subject, as well as all the graces of poetical embellishment, to step forth into the world in the character of a bard, especially when it is considered that luxury, idleness, and vice have debauched the public taste, and that nothing hardly is welcome but childish fiction, or what has at least a tendency to excite a laugh. I thought, however, that I had stumbled upon some subjects that had never before been poetically treated, and upon some others to which I imagined it would not be difficult to give an air of novelty by the manner of treating them. My sole drift is to be useful; a point which, however, I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these

two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh before they will be called upon to correct that levity, and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it alone in His hands, Who can alone produce it: neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and made efficacious by the power who superintends the truth He has vouchsafed to impart.

You made my heart ache with a sympathetic sorrow, when you described the state of your mind on occasion of your late visit into Hertfordshire. Had I been previously informed of your journey before you made it, I should have been able to have foretold all your feelings with the most unerring certainty of prediction. You will never cease to feel upon that subject; but with your principles of resignation, and acquiescence in the divine will, you will always feel as becomes a Christian. We are forbidden to murmur, but we are not forbidden to regret; and whom we loved tenderly while living we may still pursue with an affectionate remembrance, without having any occasion to charge ourselves with rebellion against the sovereignty that appointed a separation. A day is coming when I am confident you will see and know, that mercy to both parties was the principal agent in a scene, the recollection of which is still painful.      W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER, 72 ST. PAUL'S  
CHURCHYARD, LONDON

*Olney, Oct. 20, 1781.*

SIR,—I acknowledge with pleasure the accuracy of your remark on the two lines you have scored in the first page of the enclosed sheet; but though the word ‘there’ in its critical and proper use is undoubtedly an adverb denoting locality, yet I cannot but think that in the familiar strain of poetical colloquy (especially if the gay careless air of the speaker in the present instance be considered) a less exact application of it may be allowed. We say in common speech—you was scrupulous on that occasion; *there* I think you was wrong,—meaning in that part of your conduct. I do not know indeed that I should hesitate to give it that sense, if I were writing prose for the press instead of verse, or on any other occasion whatsoever.

The unexpected arrival of the enclosed so soon after the foregoing sheet has inspired me with hopes that your printer is about to proceed with the alacrity he promised so long since. It proves, however, that he is capable of great dispatch when he is pleased to use it.—I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

W<sup>M</sup>. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Oct. 22, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Mr. Bates, without intending it, has passed a severer censure upon the modern world of readers, than any that can be found in my

volume. If they are so merrily disposed, in the midst of a thousand calamities, that they will not deign to read a preface of three or four pages, because the purport of it is serious, they are far gone indeed, and in the last stage of a frenzy, such as I suppose has prevailed in all nations that have been exemplarily punished, just before the infliction of the sentence. But though he lives in the world he has so ill an opinion of, and ought therefore to know it better than I, who have no intercourse with it at all, I am willing to hope that he may be mistaken. Curiosity is an universal passion. There are few people who think a book worth their reading, but feel a desire to know something about the writer of it. This desire will naturally lead them to peep into the preface, where they will soon find that a little perseverance will furnish them with some information on the subject. If, therefore, your preface finds no readers, I shall take it for granted that it is because the book itself is accounted not worth their notice. Be that as it may, it is quite sufficient that I have played the antic myself for their diversion; and that, in a state of dejection such as they are absolute strangers to, I have sometimes put on an air of cheerfulness and vivacity, to which I myself am in reality a stranger, for the sake of winning their attention to more useful matter. I cannot endure the thought for a moment, that you should descend to my level on the occasion, and court their favour in a style not more unsuitable to your function, than to the constant and consistent strain of your whole character and conduct. No—let the preface stand. I cannot mend it. I could easily make a jest of it, but it is better as it is.

By the way—will it not be proper, as you have taken some notice of the modish dress I wear in *Table Talk*, to include *Conversation* in the same description, which is (the first half of it, at least), the most airy of the two? They will otherwise think, perhaps, that the observation might as well have been spared entirely; though I should have been sorry if it had, for when I am jocular I do violence to myself, and am therefore pleased with your telling them, in a civil way, that I play the fool to amuse them, not because I am one myself, but because I have a foolish world to deal with.

I am inclined to think that Mr. Scott will no more be troubled by Mr. Raban, with applications of the sort I mentioned in my last. Mr. Scott, since I wrote that account, has related to us, himself, what passed in the course of their interview; and, it seems, the discourse ended with his positive assurance, that he never would consent to the measure, though at the same time he declared he would never interrupt or attempt to suppress it. To which Mr. Raban replied, that unless he had his free consent, he should never engage in the office. It is to be hoped, therefore, that, in time, that part of the people, who may at present be displeased with Mr. Scott, for withholding his consent, will grow cool upon the subject, and be satisfied with receiving their instruction from their proper minister.

I beg you will, on no future occasion, leave a blank for Mrs. Newton, unless you have first engaged her promise to fill it: for thus we lose the pleasure of your company, without being indemnified for the loss by the acquisition of hers. Johnson sent me two sheets in the course of the last ten days,

to my great astonishment. I complimented him upon his alacrity in hopes that encouragement might ensure the continuance of it. The next sheet will bring the beginning of *Charity*. Our love to you both.—Yours, my dear friend, Wm. COWPER.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 5, 1781.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I give you joy of your safe return from the lips of the great deep. You did not indeed discern many signs of sobriety, or true wisdom, among the people of Brighthelmstone, but it is not possible to observe the manners of a multitude, of whatever rank, without learning something; I mean, if a man has a mind like yours, capable of reflection. If he sees nothing to imitate, he is sure to see something to avoid; if nothing to congratulate his fellow-creatures upon, at least much to excite his compassion. There is not, I think, so melancholy a sight in the world,—(an hospital is not to be compared with it,—) as that of a thousand persons distinguished by the name of gentry, who, gentle perhaps by nature, and made more gentle by education, have the appearance of being innocent and inoffensive, yet being destitute of all religion, or not at all governed by the religion they profess, are none of them at any great distance from an eternal state, where self-deception will be impossible, and where amusements cannot enter. Some of them, we may say, will be reclaimed;—it is most probable indeed that some of them will, because mercy, if

one may be allowed the expression, is fond of distinguishing itself by seeking its objects among the most desperate cases ; but the Scripture gives no encouragement to the warmest charity to hope for deliverance for them all. When I see an afflicted and an unhappy man, I say to myself, there is perhaps a man whom the world would envy, if they knew the value of his sorrows, which are possibly intended only to soften his heart, and to turn his affections towards their proper centre. But when I see or hear of a crowd of voluptuaries, who have no ears but for music, no eyes but for splendour, and no tongue but for impertinence and folly,—I say, or at least I see occasion to say—This is madness !—This persisted in must have a tragical conclusion.—It will condemn you, not only as Christians unworthy of the name, but as intelligent creatures. You know by the light of nature, if you have not quenched it, that there is a God, and that a life like yours cannot be according to His will.

I ask no pardon of you for the gravity and gloominess of these reflections, which I stumbled on when I least expected it ; though, to say the truth, these or others of a like complexion are sure to occur to me, when I think of a scene of public diversion like that you have lately left.

I remember Mr. Mitchel well ; a man famous for nothing but idling away his time at the coffee-house, and bathing upon the open beach without the decent use of a machine. I may say upon the surest ground, that the world to which he conforms despises him for doing so ; because I remember well that I and my party, who had not a grain of religion amongst us, always mentioned him with disdain ; his

charitable profanation of the Sabbath will never earn him any other wages.

I am inclined to hope that Johnson told you the truth, when he said he should publish me soon after Christmas. His press has been rather more punctual in its remittances than it used to be; we have now but little more than two of the longest pieces, and the small ones that are to follow, by way of epilogue, to print off, and then the affair is finished. But once more I am obliged to gape for franks; only these, which I hope shall be the last I shall want, at yours and Mr. Smith's convenient leisure.

We rejoice that you have had so much reason to be satisfied with John's proficiency. The more spirit he has the better, if his spirit be but manageable, and put under such management as your prudence and Mrs. Unwin's will suggest. I need not guard you against severity, of which I conclude there is no need, and which I am sure you are not at all inclined to practise without it; but perhaps if I was to whisper, 'beware of too much indulgence!'-I should only give a hint that the fondness of a father for a fine boy might seem to justify. I have no particular reason for the caution; at this distance it is not possible that I should, but in a case like yours an admonition of that sort seldom wants propriety.

Your mother has been considerably indisposed with a sore throat and feverish complaint, but is well again, except that her strength, which is never that of an Amazon, is not quite restored. Her love attends you and your family, and mine goes with it.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

*Postscript.*—Lady Austen, No. 8 Queen Ann Street, East, near Cavendish Square. You had better send a card to announce your visit, as she is a lady of many engagements, always dines at 4.

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 7, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—So far as Johnson is to be depended on—and I begin to hope that he is now in earnest—I think myself warranted to furnish you with an answer to the question which you say so often meets you. Mr. Unwin made the same inquiry at his shop in his way to Stock from Brighton, when he assured him that the book would be printed off in a month, and ready for publication after the holidays. For some time past the business has proceeded glibly, and if he perseveres at the same rate, it is probable his answer will prove a true one.

Having discontinued the practice of verse-making for some weeks, I now feel quite incapable of resuming it; and can only wonder at it, as one of the most extraordinary incidents in my life, that I should have composed a volume. Had it been suggested to me as a practicable thing, in better days, though I should have been glad to have found it so, many hindrances would have conspired to withhold me from such an enterprise. I should not have dared, at that time of day, to have committed my name to the public, and my reputation to the hazard of their opinion. But it is otherwise with me now. I am more indifferent about what may touch

me in that point, than ever I was in my life. The stake that would then have seemed important, now seems trivial; and it is of little consequence to me, who no longer feel myself possessed of what I accounted infinitely more valuable, whether the world's verdict shall pronounce me a poet, or an empty pretender to the title. This happy coldness towards a matter so generally interesting to all rhymers, left me quite at liberty for the undertaking, unfettered by fear, and under no restraints of that diffidence, which is my natural temper, and which would either have made it impossible for me to commence an author by name, or would have insured my miscarriage if I had. In my last dispatches to Johnson, I sent him a new edition of the title-page, having discarded the Latin paradox which stood at the head of the former, and added a French motto to that from Virgil. It is taken from a volume of the excellent Caraccioli,<sup>1</sup> called *Jouissance de soi-même*, and strikes me as peculiarly apposite to my purpose.

Mr. Bull is an honest man. We have seen him twice since he received your orders to march hither, and faithfully told us it was in consequence of those orders that he came. He dined with us yesterday; we were all in pretty good spirits, and the day passed very agreeably. It is not long since he called on Mr. Scott. Mr. Raban came in. Mr. Bull began, addressing himself to the former, My friend, you are in trouble; you are unhappy; I read it in your countenance. Mr. Scott replied, he had been so, but he was better. Come then, says Mr. Bull, I will expound to you the cause of all your anxiety. You

<sup>1</sup> See letters of February and March 1784.

are too common ; you make yourself cheap. Visit your people less, and converse more with your own heart. How often do you speak to them in a week ? —‘ Thrice.’—Ay, there it is ! Your sermons are an old ballad ; your prayers are an old ballad ; and you are an old ballad too.—‘ I would wish to tread in the steps of Mr. Newton.’—You do well to follow his steps in all other instances ; but in this instance you are wrong, and so was he. Mr. Newton trod a path which no man but himself could have used so long as he did, and he wore it out long before he went from Olney. Too much familiarity and condescension cost him the estimation of his people. He thought he should insure their love, to which he had the best possible title, and by those very means he lost it. Be wise, my friend ; take warning ; make yourself scarce, if you wish that persons of little understanding should know how to prize you.

When he related to us this harangue, so nicely adjusted to the case of the third person present, it did us both good, as Jacques says,

‘ It made my lungs to crow like chanticleer.’<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Unwin wishes me to inform you, that the character of Thomas —— is no longer a doubtful one at Olney. He is much addicted to public-houses, and every body knows it. Geary Ball led him home

<sup>1</sup> The truth is that Cowper, Scott, and Bull were all three wrong. Raban wanted to do a little good. He wished to conduct services occasionally at the ‘Great House.’ It was a piece of bigotry and shortsightedness on Scott’s part to oppose. Yet Scott was a truly great and noble man. If a man wants to preach, preach he will, and if the Church hinders him, off he goes to Dissent, as Raban did. Raban, in spite of peculiarities which did not commend themselves to Cowper, was right at heart.

drunk from one of them not long since, where he had been playing at quoits, and regaling himself with drink till he was unable to stand unsupported. She thought it the part of a friend to communicate to you this piece of intelligence, that you may not lend him money and lose it. He used frequently to borrow of us, but we intend henceforth to discontinue our aids of that sort.

I have only seen Mr. Jones since I received your last, and have had no opportunity to mention to him your inquiry. He was alive yesterday, however, and not long since spoke of an intended journey to London.

We wish your letter to your parishioners may have the best effects, and shall be glad to read it. Many thanks for three couple of mackerel, perfectly fresh. Our love of you both, though often sent to London, is still with us. If it is not an inexhaustible well (there is but one love that can, with propriety, be called so), it is, however, a very deep one, and not likely to fail while we are living.—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 19, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I really think your apprehensions for Mr. Madan are but too well founded. I should be more concerned than surprised to find them verified. Sanguine and confident as he has been, his mortification will be extreme when he finds that what he took for *terra firma*, was a mere vapour hanging in the horizon, in pursuit of which he has run his vessel upon shoals that must prove fatal to her. Discoverers of truth are generally sober, modest,

and humble ; and if their discoveries are less valued by mankind than they deserve to be, can bear the disappointment with patience and equality of temper. But hasty reasoners and confident asserters are generally wedded to an hypothesis, and transported with joy at their fancied acquisitions, are impatient under contradiction, and grow wild at the thoughts of a refutation. Never was an air-built castle more completely demolished than his is likely to be ; I wish with you that he may be able to sustain the shock, but am at a loss to conceive how he should do it. After awakening the attention of mankind, and calling the world around him to listen to his *Εύρηκα*, after having distressed the serious, and excited the curiosity (perhaps the appetite) of the giddy and unthinking, to find himself baffled with so much ease, and refuted with such convincing perspicuity on the part of his opponent, must give a terrible blow to every passion that engaged him in the task, and that was soothed and gratified to the utmost by his fancied success in it. This may (and every considerate person will wish it may) dispose him to a serious recollection and examination of his past conduct, and work in him a reform more valuable to him than the possession of all Solomon's wives would be, or even the establishment of polygamy by law. Surely the poor lunatic who uses his blanket for a robe, and imagines that a few straws stuck whimsically through his hair are a royal diadem, is not more to be pitied, perhaps less, than the profound reasoner who turns over shelves of folios with infinite industry and toil, and at the end of all his labour finds that he has grasped a shadow, and made himself a jest to the bystander.

I shall be obliged to you if, when you have had an opportunity to learn, you will let me know how he bears the brunt ; whether he hardens himself against conviction, which in this case is scarcely possible, whether he repents of what is past, or whether he is quite overwhelmed by regret and fruitless sorrow.

You do me an honour I little deserve when you ask my opinion upon any occasion, and speak of being determined by it. Such as it is, however, it is always at your service, and would be if it were better worth your having.—The dictates of compassion and humanity prompt you to interpose your good offices in order to prevent the publication with which this unhappy man is threatened by Mr. Haweis. They are advisers you may safely listen to, and deserve the more attention on the present occasion, as you are perhaps the only man in the world to whom such a design has been suggested, and who would know how to manage the execution of it with sufficient delicacy and discretion. The book and the author are distinct subjects, and will be for ever accounted such by all reasonable persons. The author, indeed, may suffer by the follies of the book, but the latter ought not to be judged by the character of the writer. If it were otherwise, yet in this case there can be no need of Mr. Haweis, the point in dispute being already tried, and Mr. Madan's arguments condemned at the bar of the public. Mr. Haweis will hurt himself more by one such ungenerous proceeding than he can possibly hurt Mr. Madan by divulging, if he can do it, a thousand irregularities in his conduct. Sensual and lawless gratifications are odious enough, especially in a minister ; but double detestation attends the man who, to gratify a present

enmity, avails himself of secrets he could never have had possession of, had he not once professed himself a friend. If it should happen too that Mr. Madan's intellects should be swept away by such a deluge of obloquy and detraction, following close upon his present disappointment (an event not at all improbable), Mr. Haweis will have reason to wish that he had taken his life rather than destroyed his character. He thinks, perhaps, the interest of the cause demands it of him ; but when was the cause promoted by a discovery of the vices or follies of its advocates and professors ? On the whole, therefore, if I must advise, I would advise to write.

I believe I returned Mrs. Newton thanks for the cocoa-nuts as soon as we received them, but have now a fresh occasion to thank her, Mrs. Unwin having received much benefit from them, and found her health improved ever since she began to eat them.

Our controversies here are at a stand for the present. Mr. Raban has not yet received the citation with which Mr. Page threatened him, and the Warringtonians are contented not to push forward in the business of the pew till they have seen Mr. Wright, who is expected here on Tuesday. Mr. Page is very thinly attended ; Weston and Clifton and the meetings drink up all his congregation. There were but fifteen to wait upon his last Thursday's lecture ; the blessed effect of quarrelling about straws, when he might have had peace with every body, if he had not gone out of his way to seek contention. His hearers, however, complain of great inconsistency in his preaching, and some of his warmest partisans, and whose attachment to him has lasted the longest, begin to be disgusted.

Many thanks for two pair of remarkably fine soles, with shrimps ; they were here in sixteen hours after they set out from London, and came very opportunely for me, who, having a violent cold, could hardly have eaten any thing else.

Mrs. Unwin intended to have sent a couple of fowls, but being taken out of the coop, one of them appeared to be distempered, and two others, on examination, in the same predicament ; one so bad that we were obliged to throw it away, and the other we gave away, not thinking it eatable except by those whose stomachs were less nice than our own. It is, I suppose, an epipoultrical malady.

You told me Mrs. Newton intended to have sent me a long story about the fish. With both my two eyes, assisted by my two glasses, I could make neither more nor less of it than a long song, and so I read the passage to Mrs. Unwin once and again. I should have felt more than ordinary concern for the business that prevented her, and have endeavoured by all means to persuade her to resume her intention and to send me this song immediately, if Mrs. Unwin had not some time after discovered, with more sagacity than I happened to have in exercise, that what I took for a song was only a story, the insignificant letter *t* being omitted, and the *ry* having assumed the appearance on this occasion of their near relations *ng*.

Mrs. Unwin would have attempted to write, but I dissuaded her from it, because even when she is pretty well she finds it hurtful.—You will believe us both, as ever, your obliged and affectionate friends and servants,

Wm. and M—.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Nov. 24, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—News is always acceptable, especially from another world. I cannot tell you what has been done in the Chesapeake, but I can tell you what has passed at West Wycombe, in this county. Do you feel yourself disposed to give credit to the story of an apparition? No, say you. I am of your mind. I do not believe more than one in a hundred of those tales with which old women frighten children, and teach children to frighten each other. But you are not such a philosopher, I suppose, as to have persuaded yourself that an apparition is an impossible thing. You can attend to a story of that sort, if well authenticated? Yes. Then I can tell you one.

You have heard, no doubt, of the romantic friendship that subsisted once between Paul Whitehead,<sup>1</sup> and Lord le Despenser, the late Sir Francis Dashwood. When Paul died he left his lordship a legacy. It was his heart, which was taken out of his body, and sent as directed. His friend having built a church, and at that time just finished it, used it as a mausoleum upon this occasion; and having (as I think the newspapers told us at the time) erected an elegant pillar in the centre of it, on the summit of this pillar, enclosed in a golden urn, he placed the heart in question. But not as a lady places a china figure upon her mantel-tree, or on the top of her

<sup>1</sup> Paul Whitehead (1710-1774) was, with Sir Francis Dashwood (1708-1781), a member of the Hell Fire Club, or the 'Monks of Medmenham Abbey.'

cabinet, but with much respectful ceremony, and all the forms of funeral solemnity. He hired the best singers and best performers. He composed an anthem for the purpose, he invited all the nobility and gentry in the country to assist at the celebration of these obsequies, and having formed them all into an august procession, marched to the place appointed at their head, and consigned the posthumous treasure, with his own hands, to its state of honourable elevation. Having thus, as he thought (and as he might well think, for it seems they were both renowned for their infidelity, and if they had any religion at all were pagans), appeased the manes of the deceased, he rested satisfied with what he had done, and supposed his friend would rest. But not so;—about a week since, I received a letter from a person who cannot have been misinformed, telling me that Paul has appeared frequently of late to his lordship, who labours under a complication of distempers,—that it is supposed the shock he has suffered from such unexpected visits will make his recovery, which was before improbable, impossible. Nor is this all: to ascertain the fact, and to put it out of the power of scepticism to argue away the reality of it, there are few, if any, of his lordship's numerous household, who have not likewise seen him, sometimes in the park, sometimes in the garden, as well as in the house, by day and by night, indifferently. I make no reflections upon this incident, having other things to write about, and but little room.

I am much indebted to Mr. Smith for more franks, and still more obliged by the handsome note with which he accompanied them. He has furnished me sufficiently for the present occasion, and by his ready-

ness, and obliging manner of doing it, encouraged me to have recourse to him, in case another exigence of the same kind should offer. A French author<sup>1</sup> I was reading last night says, He that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation ; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume. At present, however, I do not feel myself so disposed ; and, indeed, he that would write, should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own. I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion ; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it ; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. But enough of this.

Your mother, who is as well as the season of

<sup>1</sup> Charles Caraccioli, to whom Cowper refers, was not a Frenchman, but probably an Italian refugee. His life is enshrouded in mystery, but he was an enthusiast for topography, and while a master at the Grammar School at Arundel in 1776 he published a book called *Antiquities of Arundel*. Earlier—in 1758—he had written *Chiron, or the Mental Optician*. His best-known book, the *Life of Lord Clive*, was published in 1775-7.

the year will permit, desires me to add her love, and in particular her inquiries after Mrs. Unwin who, she hopes, does not find her health injured or her strength greatly impaired by her continual remittances to her new-born William. You will be pleased to mention us affectionately to Mrs. Shuttleworth. The salmon you sent us arrived safe, and was remarkably fresh. What a comfort it is to have a friend who knows that we love salmon, and who cannot pass by a fishmonger's shop, without finding his desire to send us some a temptation too strong to be resisted!—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Nov. 26, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND.—I wrote to you by the last post, supposing you at Stoke; but lest that letter should not follow you to Laytonstone, and you should suspect me of unreasonable delay, and lest the frank you have sent me should degenerate into waste paper, and perish upon my hands, I write again. The former letter, however, containing all my present stock of intelligence, it is more than possible that this may prove a blank, or but little worthy of your acceptance. You will do me the justice to suppose that if I could be very entertaining I would be so, because, by giving me credit for such a willingness to please, you only allow me a share of that universal vanity which inclines every man, upon all occasions, to exhibit himself to the best advantage. To say the truth, however, when

I write, as I do to you, not about business, nor on any subject that approaches to that description, I mean much less my correspondent's amusement, which my modesty will not always permit me to hope for, than my own. There is a pleasure annexed to the communication of one's ideas, whether by word of mouth or by letter, which nothing earthly can supply the place of, and it is the delight we find in this mutual intercourse that not only proves us to be creatures intended for social life, but more than any thing else perhaps fits us for it. I have no patience with philosophers :—they, one and all, suppose (at least I understand it to be a prevailing opinion among them) that man's weakness, his necessities, his inability to stand alone, have furnished the prevailing motive, under the influence of which he renounced at first a life of solitude, and became a gregarious creature. It seems to me more reasonable, as well as more honourable to my species, to suppose that generosity of soul, and a brotherly attachment to our own kind, drew us, as it were, to one common centre, taught us to build cities and inhabit them, and welcome every stranger that would cast in his lot amongst us, that we might enjoy fellowship with each other, and the luxury of reciprocal endearments, without which a paradise could afford no comfort. There are indeed all sorts of characters in the world ; there are some whose understandings are so sluggish, and whose hearts are such mere clods, that they live in society without either contributing to the sweets of it, or having any relish for them. A man of this stamp passes by our window continually ; he draws patterns for the lace makers ; I never saw him conversing with a neighbour but once

in my life, though I have known him by sight these twelve years; he is of a very sturdy make, has a round belly, extremely protuberant, which he evidently considers as his best friend, because it is his only companion, and it is the labour of his life to fill it. I can easily conceive that it is merely the love of good eating and drinking, and now and then the want of a new pair of shoes, that attaches this man so much to the neighbourhood of his fellow mortals; for suppose these exigencies, and others of a like kind, to subsist no longer, and what is there that could possibly give society the preference in his esteem? He might strut about with his two thumbs upon his hips in a wilderness; he could hardly be more silent than he is at Olney, and for any advantage, or comfort, or friendship, or brotherly affection, he could not be more destitute of such blessings there than in his present situation. But other men have something more than guts to satisfy; there are the yearnings of the heart, which, let philosophers say what they will, are more importunate than all the necessities of the body, that will not suffer a creature, worthy to be called human, to be content with an insulated life, or to look for his friends among the beasts of the forest! Yourself for instance! It is not because there are no tailors or pastry-cooks to be found upon Salisbury Plain that you do not choose it for your abode, but because you are a philanthropist,—because you are susceptible of social impressions, and have a pleasure in doing a kindness when you can. Witness the salmon you sent, and the salmon you still mean to send; to which your mother wishes you to add a handful of prawns, not only because she likes them,

but because they agree with her so well that she even finds them medicinal.

Now, upon the word of a poor creature, I have said all that I have said without the least intention to say one word of it when I began. But thus it is with my thoughts :—when you shake a crab-tree the fruit falls ; good for nothing indeed when you have got it, but still the best that is to be expected from a crab-tree. You are welcome to them, such as they are, and if you approve my sentiments, tell the philosophers of the day that I have outshot them all, and have discovered the true origin of society, when I least looked for it.

Except a pain in her face, violent at times, your mother is tolerably well, and sends her love.—Yours ever,

W.M. COWPER.

We should be glad to receive this fresh proof of your regard, viz. the additional piece of salmon, at any time before Christmas.

TO (probably) THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Date probably 1781.

IN a time of so much national distress, when war with one country seems to beget war with another by a kind of necessary and unavoidable procreation, it is fit that somebody beside the Laureate should now and then sing poor Britannia a song of encouragement, and, as far at least as a few verses can do it, endeavour to cheer her spirits. His muse is known to be an hireling, and gains the less respect to what she produces upon that account. Mine is a

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volunteer, disinterested and free, her word therefore may be taken, especially when she professes to prophesy, which is a serious business, and not to be trifled with. You are welcome to make what use you please of the following. It is a year old, but the public affairs give it even a greater propriety now than it had when it was first composed.

Then follow lines To Sir Joshua Reynolds (written in 1781).

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Nov. 27, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—First Mr. Wilson, then Mr. Teedon, and lastly Mr. Whitford,<sup>1</sup> each with a cloud of melancholy on his brow, and with a mouth wide open, have just announced to us this unwelcome intelligence from America. We are sorry to hear it, and should be more cast down than we are if we did not know that this catastrophe was ordained beforehand, and that, therefore, neither conduct, nor courage, nor any means that can possibly be mentioned, could have prevented it. If the King and his ministry can be contented to close the business here, and, taking poor Dean Tucker's advice, resign the Americans into the hands of their new masters, it may be well for Old England. But if they will still persevere, they will find it, I doubt, an hopeless contest to the last. Domestic murmurs will grow louder, and the hands of faction, being strengthened by this late miscarriage, will find it easy to set fire to the pile of combustibles they have

<sup>1</sup> The minister of the Independent Chapel.

been so long employed in building. These are my politics ; and for aught I can see, you and we by our respective firesides, though neither connected with men in power, nor professing to possess any share of that sagacity which thinks itself qualified to wield the affairs of kingdoms, can make as probable conjectures, and look forward into futurity with as clear a sight as the greatest man in the cabinet.

Though when I wrote the passage in question I was not at all aware of any impropriety in it, and though I have frequently since that time both read and recollected it with the same approbation, I lately became uneasy upon the subject, and had no rest in my mind for three days, till I resolved to submit it to a trial at your tribunal, and to dispose of it ultimately according to your sentence. I am glad you have condemned it ; and though I do not feel as if I could presently supply its place, shall be willing to attempt the task, whatever labour it may cost me ; and rejoice that it will not be in the power of the critics, whatever else they may charge me with, to accuse me of bigotry, or a design to make a certain denomination of Christians odious, at the hazard of the public peace. I had rather my book were burnt than a single line guilty of such a tendency should escape me.

We thank you for two copies of your Address to your Parishioners. The first I lent to Mr. Scott, whom I have not seen since I put it into his hands. You have managed your subject well ; have applied yourself to despisers and absentees of every description, in terms so expressive of the interest you take in their welfare, that the most wrong-headed person cannot be offended. We both wish it may have the

effect you intend, and that prejudices and groundless apprehensions being removed, the immediate objects of your ministry may make a more considerable part of your congregation.

I return Mr. Madan's letter, with thanks for a sight of it. Having forfeited all the rest of his most valuable attachments without regret, and sacrificed, I suppose, many of his dearest connections to his beloved hypothesis, he still recollects that he had once a warm place in your affections, and seems still unwilling to resign it. It is easy to see that I and my book were mentioned, merely because we afforded him an opportunity to renew a correspondence which, blind as he is, and intoxicated with error, he still catches at with eagerness, and cannot prevail with himself to renounce. But yet how obstinate, and, in appearance, how perfectly a stranger to the convincing arguments by which his whole edifice of sophistry and misinterpretation has been so completely demolished! Has he never seen his opponent in the *Review*? If he has, he ought at least to attempt to answer him. To treat so able and so learned a writer with neglect is but a paltry subterfuge, and no reasonable man will ever give him credit for the sincerity of the contempt he may affect for a critic so deserving of his attention. If he has not, his behaviour is disingenuous to the last degree, and will, I suppose, as little serve his purpose. A champion has no right to despise his enemy till he has faced and vanquished him. But henceforth I suppose this noisy subject will be silent; may it rest in peace, and may none be hardy enough hereafter to disturb its ashes.

Many thanks for a barrel of oysters, which we are

still eating. Nanny Puttenham desires me to send her duty : she is brought to bed, and enjoys a more comfortable frame of mind. The letter from Mr. Old ought to have waited on you with my last, but was forgot. Our best love attends yourself and Mrs. Newton.—Yours, sir, as ever,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

*Olney, Nov. 27, 1781.*

SIR,—You will oblige me by telling me in your next, whether, if I should find it proper to displace a paragraph in *Expostulation*, and substitute another in its stead, there is yet time for the purpose. I have doubts about the expedience of mentioning the subject on which that paragraph is written.

Many thanks for your judicious remarks.—I am,  
etc.,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Nov. 27, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—A visit from Mr. Whitford shortened one of your letters to me; and now the same cause has operated with the same effect upon one of mine to you. He is just gone; desired me to send his love, and talks of enclosing a letter to you in my next cover.

*Literas tuas irato Sacerdoti scriptas, legi, perlegi,  
et ne verbum quidem mutandum censeo. Gratias  
tibi acturum si sapiat, existimo; sin aliter eveniat,  
amici tamen officium præstitisti, et te coram te  
vindicasti.*

I have not written in Latin to show my scholarship, nor to excite Mrs. Newton's curiosity, nor for

any other wise reason whatever ; but merely because, just at that moment, it came into my head to do so.

Mrs. Unwin having suggested the hint, I have added just as many lines to my poem lately mentioned as make up the whole number two hundred. I had no intention to write a round sum, but it has happened so. She thought there was a fair opportunity to give the Bishops a slap ; and as it would not have been civil to have denied a lady so reasonable a request, I have just made the powder fly out of their wigs a little.

I never wrote a copy of *Mary and John*<sup>1</sup> in my life, except that which I sent to you. It was one - of those bagatelles which sometimes spring up like mushrooms in my imagination, either while I am writing or just before I begin. I sent it to you, because to you I send anything that I think may raise a smile ; but should never have thought of multiplying the impression. Neither did I ever repeat them to any one except Mrs. Unwin. The inference is fair and easy, that you have some friend who has a good memory.

This afternoon the maid opened the parlour-door, and told us there was a lady in the kitchen. We desired she might be introduced, and prepared for the reception of Mrs. Jones. But it proved to be a lady unknown to us, and not Mrs. Jones. She walked directly up to Mrs. Unwin, and never drew back till their noses were almost in contact. It seemed as if she meant to salute her. An uncommon

<sup>1</sup> If John marries Mary and Mary alone,  
     'Tis a very good match between Mary and John.  
     Should John wed a score, Oh, the claws and the scratches !  
     It can't be a match—'tis a bundle of matches.

degree of familiarity, accompanied with an air of most extraordinary gravity, made me think her a little crazy. I was alarmed, and so was Mrs. Unwin. She had a bundle in her hand—a silk handkerchief tied up at the four corners. When I found she was not mad, I took her for a smuggler, and made no doubt but she had brought samples of contraband goods. But our surprise, considering the lady's appearance and deportment, was tenfold what it had been, when we found that it was Mary Philips's daughter, who had brought us a few apples by way of a specimen of a quantity she had for sale. She drank tea with us, and behaved herself during the rest of her stay with much—*cætera desunt.*

TO JOSEPH HILL

Nov. 30, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Though I have a deal of wit, and Mrs. Unwin has much more, it would require more than our joint stock amounts to, to answer all the demands of these gloomy days and long evenings. Books are the only remedy I can think of, but books are a commodity we deal but little in at Olney. If, therefore, it may consist with your other various multifarious concerns, I shall be obliged to you if you will be so good as to subscribe for me to some well-furnished circulating library, and leave my address upon the counter, written in a legible hand, and order them to send me down a catalogue. Their address you will be so good as to transmit to me, and then you shall have no further trouble.

This being merely a letter of business, I add no more, but that I am yours,

Wm. COWPER.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 2, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for the note. There is some advantage in having a tenant who is irregular in his payments: the longer the rent is withheld, the more considerable the sum when it arrives; to which we may add, that its arrival being unexpected, a circumstance that obtains always in a degree exactly in proportion to the badness of the tenant, is always sure to be the occasion of an agreeable surprise; a sensation that deserves to be ranked among the pleasantest that belong to us.

I gave two hundred and fifty pounds for the chambers. Mr. Ashurst's receipt, and the receipt of the person of whom he purchased, are both among my papers; and when wanted, as I suppose they will be in case of a sale, shall be forthcoming at your order.

The conquest of America seems to go on but slowly. Our ill-success in that quarter will oblige me to suppress two pieces that I was rather proud of. They were written two or three years ago; not long after the double repulse sustained by Mr. D'Estaing at Lucia and at Savannah,<sup>1</sup> and when our operations in the western world wore a more promising aspect. Presuming, upon such promises, that I might venture to prophesy an illustrious consummation of the war, I did so. But my predictions proving false, the verse in which they were expressed must perish with them.

<sup>1</sup> 1779. The colonists, supported by the French, had attempted unsuccessfully to recover Savannah. See next letter.

Since I began to write, I have searched all the papers I have, and cannot find the receipts above-mentioned. I hope, however, they are not essential to the validity of the transaction.—Yours, my dear sir,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Dec. 4, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The present to the Queen of France, and the piece addressed to Sir Joshua Reynolds, my only two political efforts, being of the predictive kind, and both falsified, or likely to be so, by the miscarriage of the royal cause in America,<sup>1</sup> were already condemned when I received your last. I have a poetical epistle which I wrote last summer, and another poem not yet finished, in stanzas, with which I mean to supply their places. Henceforth I have done with politics. The stage of national affairs is such a fluctuating scene, that an event which appears probable to-day becomes impossible to-morrow; and unless a man were indeed a prophet, he cannot, but with the greatest hazard of losing his labour, bestow his rhymes upon future contingencies, which perhaps are never to take place but in his own wishes and in the reveries of his own fancy. I learned when I was a boy, being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavours. Prior's pieces of that sort were recommended to my par-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, 19th Oct. 1781. This practically ended the war.

ticular notice ; and as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and I think some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples, and while I lived in the Temple produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to be popular. What we learn in childhood we retain long ; and the successes we met with, about three years ago, when D'Estaing was twice repulsed, once in America, and once in the West Indies, having set fire to my patriotic zeal once more, it discovered itself by the same symptoms, and produced effects much like those it had produced before. But, unhappily, the ardour I felt upon the occasion, disdaining to be confined within the bounds of fact, pushed me upon uniting the prophetical with the poetical character, and defeated its own purpose. I am glad it did. The less there is of that sort in my book the better ; it will be more consonant to your character, who patronise the volume, and, indeed, to the constant tenor of my own thoughts upon public matters, that I should exhort my countrymen to repentance, than that I should flatter their pride—that vice for which, perhaps, they are even now so severely punished.

I subjoin the lines with which I mean to supersede the obnoxious ones<sup>1</sup> in *Expostulation*. If it should lie fairly in your way to do it, I will beg of you to deliver them to Johnson, and at the same time to

<sup>1</sup> For the ‘obnoxious lines,’ see *The Unpublished Poems of Cowper* (Fisher Unwin), p. 44.

strike your pen through the offensive passage. I ask it merely because it will save a frank, but not unless you can do it without inconvenience to yourself. The new paragraph consists exactly of the same number of lines with the old one, for upon this occasion I worked like a tailor when he sews a patch upon a hole in your coat, supposing it might be necessary to do so. Upon second thoughts I will enclose the lines instead of adding them *ad calcem*, that I may save you the trouble of a transcript.

We are glad, for Mr. Barham's sake, that he has been so happily disappointed. How little does the world suspect what passes in it every day!—that true religion is working the same wonders now as in the first ages of the church,—that parents surrender up their children into the hands of God, to die at his own appointed moment, and by what death he pleases, without a murmur, and receive them again as if by a resurrection from the dead! The world, however, would be more justly chargeable with wilful blindness than it is, if all professors of the truth exemplified its power in their conduct as conspicuously as Mr. Barham.

Easterly winds, and a state of confinement within our own walls, suit neither me nor Mrs. Unwin; though we are both, to use the Irish term rather unwell than ill. The cocoa-nut, though it had not a drop of liquor in it, and though the kernel came out whole, entirely detached from the shell, was an exceeding good one. Our hearts are with you.—Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Mrs. Madan is happy. She will be found ripe, fall when she may.

We are sorry you speak doubtfully about a spring visit to Olney. Those doubts must not outlive the winter.

X

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Dec. 9, 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having returned you many thanks for the fine cod and oysters you favoured me with, though it is now morning I will suppose it afternoon, that you and I dined together, are comfortably situated by a good fire, and just entering on a sociable conversation. You speak first, because I am a man of few words.

Well, Cowper, what do you think of this American war?

I. To say the truth I am not very fond of thinking about it; when I do, I think of it unpleasantly enough. I think it bids fair to be the ruin of the country.

You. That's very unpleasant indeed! If that should be the consequence, it will be the fault of those who might put a stop to it if they would.

I. But do you really think that practicable?

You. Why not? If people leave off fighting, peace follows of course. I wish they would withdraw the forces and put an end to the squabble.

Now I am going to make a long speech.

I. You know the complexion of my sentiments upon some subjects well enough, and that I do not look upon public events either as fortuitous, or absolutely derivable either from the wisdom or folly of man. These indeed operate as second causes; but we must look for the cause of the decline or the prosperity of an empire elsewhere. I have long since

done complaining of men and measures, having learned to consider them merely as the instruments of a higher Power, by which He either bestows wealth, peace, and dignity upon a nation when He favours it; or by which He strips it of all those honours, when public enormities long persisted in provoke Him to inflict a public punishment. The counsels of great men become as foolish and preposterous when He is pleased to make them so, as those of the frantic creatures in Bedlam, when they lay their distracted heads together to consider of the state of the nation. But I go still farther. The wisdom, or the want of wisdom, that we observe, or think we observe, in those that rule us, entirely out of the question, I cannot look upon the circumstances of this country without being persuaded that I discern in them an entanglement and perplexity that I have never met with in the history of any other, which I think preternatural (if I may use the word on such a subject), prodigious in its kind, and such as human sagacity can never remedy. I have a good opinion of the understanding and integrity of some in power, yet I see plainly that they are unequal to the task. I think as favourably of some that are not in power, yet I am sure they have never yet in any of their speeches recommended the plan that would effect the salutary purpose. If we pursue the war, it is because we are desperate; it is plunging and sinking year after year into still greater depths of calamity. If we relinquish it, the remedy is equally desperate, and would prove I believe in the end no remedy at all. Either way we are undone. Perseverance will only enfeeble us more; we cannot recover the colonies by arms. If we discontinue the attempt, in that

case we fling away voluntarily what in the other we strive ineffectually to regain ; and whether we adopt the one measure or the other, are equally undone : for I consider the loss of America as the ruin of England. Were we less encumbered than we are at home, we could but ill afford it ; but being crushed as we are under an enormous debt that the public credit can at no rate carry much longer, the consequence is sure. Thus it appears to me that we are squeezed to death between the two sides of that sort of alternative which is commonly called a cleft stick, the most threatening and portentous condition in which the interests of any country can possibly be found.

I think I have done pretty well for a man of few words, and have contrived to have all the talk to myself. I thank you for not interrupting me.—  
Yours, my dear friend,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

15 Dec. 1781.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The salmon and lobsters arrived safe, and were remarkably fine : we knew the reason why you sent no prawns before you mentioned it. Accept our thanks for the welcome present.

I dare say I do not enter exactly into your idea of a present theocracy, because mine amounts to no more than the common one, that all mankind, though few are really aware of it, act under a providential direction, and that a gracious superintendence in

particular is the lot of those who trust in God. Thus I think respecting individuals; and with respect to the kingdoms of the earth, that perhaps by His own immediate operation, though more probably by the intervention of angels (*vide Daniel*), the great Governor manages and rules them, assigns them their origin, duration and end, appoints them prosperity or adversity, glory or disgrace, as their virtues or their vices, their regard to the dictates of conscience and His word, or their prevailing neglect of both, may indicate and require. But in this persuasion, as I said, I do not at all deviate from the general opinion of those who believe a Providence, at least who have a scriptural belief of it. I suppose, therefore, you mean something more, and shall be glad to be more particularly informed.

I am glad (we are both so) that you are not afraid of seeing your own image multiplied too fast; it is not necessarily a disadvantage. It is sometimes easier to manage and provide for half a dozen children, than to regulate the passions and satisfy the extravagant demands of one. I remember hearing Moses Browne<sup>1</sup> say, that when he had only two or three children he thought he should have been distracted; but when he had ten or a dozen he was perfectly easy, and thought no more about the matter.

Mrs. Unwin is not singular in her distress, but we do not sympathise the less with her for that reason. A lady in our neighbourhood, whom I believe I have mentioned before, upon a like occasion, is tormented with apprehensions upon the same account, sometimes almost to a frenzy. She has,

<sup>1</sup> Non-resident vicar of Olney.

however, had a very favourable passage through the scene she so much dreaded.

I see but one feature in the face of our national concerns that pleases me;—the war with America, it seems, is to be conducted on a different plan. This is something; when a long series of measures of a certain description has proved unsuccessful, the adoption of others is at least pleasing, as it encourages a hope that they may possibly prove wiser, and more effectual; but, indeed, without discipline all is lost. Pitt himself could have done nothing with such tools; but he would not have been so betrayed; he would have made the traitors answer with their heads, for their cowardice or supineness, and their punishment would have made survivors active.

W. C.

I send you, on the other side, some lines I addressed last summer to a lady in France, a particular friend of Lady Austen, a person much afflicted, but of great piety and patience, a Protestant<sup>1</sup>—they are not for publication, and therefore I send them:—

MADAM—A stranger's purpose in these lays.

Pray remember the poor this winter.—Your humble  
Bellman,

Wm. COWPER.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Billacoys. This poem contains the beautiful couplet—

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,  
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.

TO LADY AUSTEN.

17 December 1781.

DEAR ANNA, between friend and friend,  
Prose answers every common end ;  
Serves in a plain and homely way,  
T' express th' occurrence of the day ;  
Our health, the weather, and the news ;  
What walks we take, what books we choose ;  
And all the floating thoughts we find  
Upon the surface of the mind.

But when a poet takes the pen,  
Far more alive than other men,  
He feels a gentle tingling come  
Down to his finger and his thumb,  
Deriv'd from nature's noblest part,  
The centre of a glowing heart :  
And this is what the world, who knows  
No flights above the pitch of prose,  
His more sublime vagaries slighting,  
Denominates an itch for writing.  
No wonder I, who scribble rhyme  
To catch the triflers of the time,  
And tell them truths divine and clear,  
Which, couch'd in prose, they will not hear ;  
Who labour hard to allure and draw  
The loiterers I never saw,  
Should feel that itching, and that tingling,  
With all my purpose intermingling,  
To your intrinsic merit true,  
When call'd t' address myself to you.

Mysterious are His ways, whose power  
Brings forth that unexpected hour,  
When minds, that never met before,  
Shall meet, unite, and part no more ;  
It is th' allotment of the skies,  
The hand of the Supremely Wise,  
That guides and governs our affections,  
And plans and orders our connexions ;  
Directs us in our distant road,  
And marks the bounds of our abode.  
Thus we were settled when you found us,  
Peasants and children all around us,  
Not dreaming of so dear a friend,  
Deep in the abyss of Silver-End.<sup>1</sup>  
Thus Martha,<sup>2</sup> ev'n against her will,  
Perch'd on the top of yonder hill ;  
And you, though you must needs prefer  
The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre,<sup>3</sup>  
Are come from distant Loire, to choose  
A cottage on the banks of Ouse.  
This page of Providence quite new,  
And now just opening to our view,  
Employs our present thoughts and pains  
To guess and spell what it contains :  
But day by day, and year by year,  
Will make the dark enigma clear ;  
And furnish us perhaps at last,  
Like other scenes already past,  
With proof that we and our affairs,  
Are part of a Jehovah's cares :

<sup>1</sup> The corner of Olney market-place nearest Cowper's house.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Jones, Lady Austen's sister.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Austen's residence in France.

For God unfolds, by slow degrees,  
The purport of His deep decrees ;  
Sheds every hour a clearer light,  
In aid of our defective sight ;  
And spreads at length before the soul,  
A beautiful and perfect whole,  
Which busy man's inventive brain  
Toils to anticipate in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known  
The beauties of a rose full blown,  
Could you, tho' luminous your eye,  
By looking on the bud descry,  
Or guess with a prophetic power,  
The future splendour of the flower ?  
Just so, th' Omnipotent, who turns  
The system of a world's concerns,  
From mere minutiae can educe  
Events of most important use ;  
And bid a dawning sky display  
The blaze of a meridian day.  
The works of man tend, one and all,  
As needs they must, from great to small ;  
And vanity absorbs at length  
The monuments of human strength.  
But who can tell how vast the plan  
Which this day's incident began ?  
Too small perhaps the slight occasion  
For our dim-sighted observation ;  
It pass'd unnoticed, as the bird  
That cleaves the yielding air unheard,  
And yet may prove, when understood,  
An harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem, or mean to call,  
Friendship, a blessing cheap, or small ;  
But merely to remark, that ours,  
Like some of nature's sweetest flowers,  
Rose from a seed of tiny size,  
That seem'd to promise no such prize :  
A transient visit intervening,  
And made almost without a meaning,  
(Hardly the effect of inclination,  
Much less of pleasing expectation),  
Produc'd a friendship, then begun,  
That has cemented us in one ;  
And placed it in our power to prove,  
By long fidelity and love,  
That Solomon has wisely spoken ;  
'A threefold cord is not soon broken.'<sup>1</sup>

## TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

1781.

SIR,—I always ascribe your silence to the cause you assign for it yourself. I enclose *Friendship*, in hopes that it may arrive in time to stand the foremost of the smaller pieces, instead of *Ætna*, which, perhaps, had better be placed at the end. Such a length of the *penseroso* will make the *allegro* doubly welcome; but if the press has gone forward and begun *Ætna*, it is of no great importance: otherwise I should prefer this arrangement, as we shall then begin and end with a compliment to the King —who (poor man) may at this time be glad of such a tribute.

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. iv. 12. The strands were Cowper, Mrs. Unwin, and Lady Austen.

Instead of the fifth line in the supplemental passage you have received, in which the word *disgrace* is inadvertently repeated, being mentioned in the first, I would wish you to insert the following—

'When sin has shed dishonour on thy brow.'

But if the passage is already printed I can make the alteration myself when the sheet comes down for the last revisal.

P. 288. ———'because they must.'

I suppose you scored these words as of an import too similar to the word *convenience*, I have therefore relieved the objection by the word *self-impoorerished*; otherwise it does not appear to me that the expression is objectionable: it is plain, indeed, but not bald.—I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

WM. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Dec. 17, 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The poem I had in hand when I wrote last is on the subject of Friendship. By the following post I received a packet from Johnson. The proof-sheet it contained brought our business down to the latter part of *Retirement*; the next will consequently introduce the first of the smaller pieces. The volume consisting, at least four-fifths of it, of heroic verse as it is called and graver matter, I was desirous to displace the Burning Mountain<sup>1</sup> from the post it held in the van of the

<sup>1</sup> The poem on Etna, entitled *Heroism*. *Etna* seems to have been its first title.

light infantry, and throw it into the rear. Having finished *Friendship*, and fearing that if I delayed to send it, the press would get the start of my intention, and knowing perfectly that with respect to the subject, and the subject matter of it, it contained nothing that you would think exceptionable, I took the liberty to transmit it to Johnson, and hope that the next post will return it to me printed. It consists of between thirty and forty stanzas ; a length that qualifies it to supply the place of the two cancelled pieces, without the aid of the Epistle I mentioned. According to the present arrangement, therefore, *Friendship*, which is rather of a lively cast, though quite sober, will follow next after *Retirement*, and *Aetna* will close the volume. Modern naturalists, I think, tell us that the volcano forms the mountain. I shall be charged therefore, perhaps, with an unphilosophical error in supposing that *Aetna* was once unconscious of intestine fires, and as lofty as at present before the commencement of the eruptions. It is possible, however, that the rule, though just in some instances, may not be of universal application ; and if it be, I do not know that a poet is obliged to write with a philosopher at his elbow, prepared always to bind down his imagination to mere matters of fact. You will oblige me by your opinion ; and tell me, if you please, whether you think an apologetical note may be necessary ; for I would not appear a dunce in matters that every Review-reader must needs be apprised of. I say a note, because an alteration of the piece is impracticable ; at least without cutting off its head, and setting on a new one ; a task I should not readily undertake, because the lines which must, in that

case, be thrown out, are some of the most poetical in the performance.

Possessing greater advantages, and being equally dissolute with the most abandoned of the neighbouring nations, we are certainly more criminal than they. They *cannot* see, and we *will* not. It is to be expected, therefore, that when judgment is walking through the earth, it will come commissioned with the heaviest tidings to the people chargeable with the most perverseness. In the latter part of the Duke of Newcastle's<sup>1</sup> administration, all faces gathered blackness. The people, as they walked the streets, had, every one of them, a countenance like what we may suppose to have been the prophet Jonah's, when he cried 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.' But our Nineveh too repented, that is to say, she was affected in a manner somewhat suitable to her condition. She was dejected; she learned an humbler language, and seemed, if she did not trust in God, at least to have renounced her confidence in herself. A respite ensued; the expected ruin was averted; and her prosperity became greater than ever. Again she became self-conceited and proud, as at the first; and how stands it with our Nineveh now? Even as you say; her distress is infinite, her destruction appears inevitable, and her heart as hard as the nether millstone. Thus, I suppose, it was when ancient Nineveh found herself agreeably disappointed; she turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, and that flagrant abuse of mercy exposed her, at the expiration of forty years, to the complete execution of a sentence she had only been

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle (1693-1768), twice Prime Minister of England.

threatened with before. A similarity of events, accompanied by a strong similarity of conduct, seems to justify our expectations that the catastrophe will not be very different. But after all, the designs of Providence are inscrutable, and as in the case of individuals, so in that of nations, the same causes do not always produce the same effects. The country indeed cannot be saved in its present state of profigacy and profaneness, but may, nevertheless, be led to repentance by means we are little aware of, and at a time when we least expect it.

In the mislaid letters I took notice of certain disagreeable doubts you had expressed in one enclosed to us and unsealed, concerning your visit next spring to Olney. You will be so good as to send those doubts packing, and convince them that they are unreasonable intruders, by coming down as soon as your famous festival is over. We have to thank you for a barrel of oysters, exceeding good.

Our best love attends yourself and Mrs. Newton, and we rejoice that you feel no burthens but those you bear in common with the liveliest and most favoured Christians.—It is a happiness in poor Peggy's case that she can swallow five shillings' worth of physic in a day, but a person must be in her case to be duly sensible of it.—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

Mrs. Unwin begs Mrs. Newton's acceptance of a couple of chickens. She would have sent a goose, but none have come our way.

James Robinson was buried on Sunday. The opinion of the well-informed is that his drams cost him a guinea a week to the last.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*21st Dec. 1781.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I might easily make this letter a continuation of my last, another national miscarriage having furnished me with a fresh illustration of the remarks we have both been making. Mr. Smith, who has most obligingly supplied me with franks throughout my whole concern with Johnson, accompanied the last parcel he sent me with a note dated from the House of Commons, in which he seemed happy to give me the earliest intelligence of the capture of the French transports by Admiral Kempfent, and of a close engagement between the two fleets, so much to be expected. This note was written on Monday, and reached me by Wednesday's post; but, alas! the same post brought us the newspaper that informed us of his being forced to fly before a much superior enemy, and glad to take shelter in the port he had left so lately. This event, I suppose, will have worse consequences than the mere disappointment; will furnish opposition, as all our ill success has done, with the fuel of dissension, and with the means of thwarting and perplexing administration. Thus all we purchase with the many millions expended yearly is distress to ourselves, instead of our enemies, and domestic quarrels, instead of victories abroad. It takes a great many blows to knock down a great nation; and, in the case of poor England, a great many heavy ones have not been wanting. They make us reel and stagger, indeed; but the blow is not yet struck that is make us fall upon our knees.

That fall would save us ; but if we fall upon our side at last, we are undone. So much for politics. Next comes news from the north of a different complexion, which it is possible may be news to you.

Mr. Fletcher,<sup>1</sup> on his recovery from his late dangerous illness, has started up a Perfectionist. He preached perfection not long since at Dewsbury, where Mr. Powley and his curate heard him. He told the people that he that sinned was no Christian, that he himself did not sin, *ergo* had a right to the appellation. Mr. Powley was so shocked by his violent distortion of the Scriptures, by which he attempted to prove his doctrine, that he thought it necessary to preach expressly against him the ensuing Sabbath ; and when he was desired to admit the perfect man into his pulpit, of course refused it. I have heard that he is remarkably spiritual. Can this be ? Is it possible that a person of that description can be left to indulge himself in such a proud conceit—is it possible he should be so defective in self-knowledge, and so little acquainted with his own heart ? If I had not heard you yourself speak favourably of him, I should little scruple to say, that having spent much of his life, and exerted all his talents, in the defence of Arminian errors, he is at last left to fall into an error more pernicious than Arminius is to be charged with, or the most ignorant of his disciples. When I hear that you are engaged in the propagation of error, I shall believe that an humble and dependent mind is not yet secured from it, and that the promises which annex the blessing of instruction to a temper teach-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. William Fletcher of Madeley, the distinguished Evangelical preacher. He died in 1785.

able and truly child-like, are to be received *cum grano salis*, and understood with a limitation. Mr. Wesley has also been very troublesome in the same place, and asserted, in perfect harmony of sentiment with his brother Fletcher, that Mr. Whitefield disseminated more false doctrine in the nation than he should ever be able to eradicate. Methinks they do not see through a glass darkly, but for want of a glass they see not at all.

I enclose a few lines<sup>1</sup> on a thought which struck me yesterday. If you approve of them, you know what to do with them. I should think they might occupy the place of an introduction, and should call them by that name, if I did not judge the name I have given them necessary for the information of the reader. A flatting mill is not met with in every street, and my book will, perhaps, fall into the hands of many who do not know that such a mill was ever invented. It happened to me, however, to spend much of my time in one when I was a boy, when I frequently amused myself with watching the operation I describe.

Mrs. Unwin sends her love, and will be much obliged to Mrs. Newton if she will order her down a loaf of sugar, from ninepence to tenpence the pound, for the use of my sweet self at breakfast. The sugar merchant, if she will be so kind as to give him the necessary instruction, will be paid by the book-keeper at the inn.—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

<sup>1</sup> *The Flatting Mill.*

## TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

31st Dec. 1781.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Yesterday's post, which brought me yours, brought me a packet from Johnson. We have reached the middle of the Mahometan Hog.<sup>1</sup> By the way, your lines, which, when we had the pleasure of seeing you here, you said you would furnish him with, are not inserted in it. I did not recollect, till after I had finished the *Flattening Mill*, that it bore any affinity to the motto taken from Caraccioli. The resemblance, however, did not appear to me to give any impropriety to the verses, as the thought is much enlarged upon, and enlivened by the addition of a new comparison. But if it is not wanted, it is superfluous; and if superfluous, better omitted. I shall not bumble Johnson for finding fault with *Friendship*,<sup>2</sup> though I have a better opinion of it myself; but a poet is, of all men, the most unfit to be judge in his own cause. Partial to all his productions, he is always most partial to the youngest. But as there is a sufficient quantity without it, let that sleep too. If I should live to write again, I may possibly take up that subject a second time, and clothe it in a different dress. It abounds with excellent matter, and much more than I could find room for in two or three pages.

I consider England and America as once one country. They were so, in respect of interest, intercourse, and affinity. A great earthquake has made

<sup>1</sup> *The Love of the World Reproved*—Globe Edition, p. 168.<sup>2</sup> Globe Edition, p. 342.

a partition, and now the Atlantic ocean flows between them. He that can drain that ocean, and shove the two shores together, so as to make them aptly coincide, and meet each other in every part, can unite them again. But this is a work for Omnipotence, and nothing less than Omnipotence can heal the breach between us. This dispensation is evidently a scourge to England;—but is it a blessing to America? Time may prove it one, but at present it does not seem to wear an aspect favourable to their privileges, either civil or religious. I cannot doubt the truth of Dr. W.'s assertion; but the French, who pay but little regard to treaties that clash with their convenience, without a treaty, and even in direct contradiction to verbal engagements, can easily pretend a claim to a country which they have both bled and paid for; and if the validity of that claim be disputed, behold an army ready landed, and well-appointed, and in possession of some of the most fruitful provinces, prepared to prove it. A scourge is a scourge at one end only. A bundle of thunderbolts, such as you have seen in the talons of Jupiter's eagle, is at both ends equally tremendous, and can inflict a judgment upon the West, at the same moment that it seems to intend only the chastisement of the East.

In my last letter,<sup>1</sup> in which I desired your opinion of *Aetna*, whether its poetical merits might not atone for its philosophical defects, I begged the favour of Mrs. Newton to get the silk knitting dyed black. Mrs. Unwin will take care of the hams, but the pig is not likely to bequeath them yet: she is sorry that Mrs. Newton has bespoke them, having one in cure

<sup>1</sup> Not his last, but the letter of December 17, which see.

for her at this time. Is very much disappointed that she cannot procure a goose, but has a couple of very fine fowls, which wait your orders, and will be sent at whatever time you shall appoint. She will be glad of a loaf of sugar, the grocer to be paid at the inn.

I should have sent you a longer letter, but a visitor<sup>1</sup> who is more tedious than entertaining has rather disconcerted me, and exhausted my spirits. ‘Your humble servant, Sir—I hope I see you well.—I thank you, Madam, but indifferent. I have had a violent colic, which providentially took a turn downwards, or I think I must have died. Seven or eight times in a night, Madam. My neighbour Banister has the same disorder, and is remarkably costive, so that I verily fear for his life. Yes truly, I think the poor man cannot get over it.’ This is a small specimen—how should you like the whole? I can find you a sheet full of the like whenever you please, taken faithfully from his lips.

Our joint love attends you both. We rejoice to hear that Mrs. Newton is better.—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

#### TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

THAT the fact may speak for itself, and that there may be no room for you to suspect that the following stanzas were the fruit of an afterthought, occasioned by your gentle remonstrance, I transcribe and send them to you now, and because I know what sort of a mind yours is, how feeling and how restless till it is pacified and composed (in which respect it not a

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Teedon, no doubt.

little resembles my own), I anticipate the ordinary opportunity by forwarding the letter to Newport by a private hand that it may reach you a day the sooner. The lines are now in Johnson's hands, and will, I hope, in a few days be in the press.

## LINES

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN<sup>1</sup>

(Here follow the five stanzas of same.)

I intended to have surprised you with them, but the present necessity has deprived me of that pleasure.

I just recollect that my good intentions of extraordinary despatch are vain, as no post goes to town on a Saturday.

We wish little John many happy birthdays, and beg that you and yours will accept our love and congratulations.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

As I promised you verse if you would send me a frank, I am not willing to return the cover without some, though I think I have already wearied you with the prolixity of my prose.

## THE LILY AND THE ROSE

'The nymph must lose her female friend,' etc.<sup>2</sup>

(Seven stanzas.)

I must refer you to those unaccountable gaddings and caprices of the human mind for the cause of

<sup>1</sup> The lines to W. C. Unwin appeared in Cowper's first volume, published in 1782.

<sup>2</sup> Globe Edition, p. 168.

this production, for in general, I believe there is no man who has less to do with the ladies' cheeks than I have. I suppose it would be best to antedate it, and to imagine that it was written twenty years ago, for my mind was never more in a trifling butterfly trim than when I composed it, even in the earliest follies of my life. And what is worse than all this, I have translated it into Latin—but that some other time.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Jan. 5, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Did I allow myself to plead the common excuse of idle correspondents, and esteem it a sufficient reason for not writing, that I have nothing to write about, I certainly should not write now. But I have so often found, on similar occasions, when a great penury of matter has seemed to threaten me with an utter impossibility of hatching a letter, that nothing is necessary but to put pen to paper, and go on, in order to conquer all difficulties—that, availing myself of past experience, I now begin with a most assured persuasion, that sooner or later, one idea naturally suggesting another, I shall come to a most prosperous conclusion.

In the last 'Review,' I mean in the last but one, I saw Johnson's critique upon Prior and Pope. I am bound to acquiesce in his opinion of the latter, because it has always been my own. I could never agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others (I have known such, and persons of taste

and discernment too), who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses, and in every line he ever wrote, we see indubitable marks of the most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearyed application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, but so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes), as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal. So far, therefore, I have no quarrel with Johnson. But I cannot subscribe to what he says of Prior. In the first place, though my memory may fail me, I do not recollect that he takes any notice of his *Solomon*; in my mind the best poem, whether we consider the subject of it, or the execution, that he ever wrote. In the next place, he condemns him for introducing Venus and Cupid into his love-verses, and concludes it impossible his passion could be sincere, because when he would express it he has recourse to fables. But when Prior wrote, those deities were not so obsolete as now. His contemporary writers, and some that succeeded him, did not think them beneath their notice. Tibullus, in reality, disbelieved their

existence as much as we do ; yet Tibullus is allowed to be the prince of all poetical inamoratos, though he mentions them in almost every page. There is a fashion in these things, which the Doctor seems to have forgotten. But what shall we say of his old fusty-rusty remarks upon Henry and Emma ? I agree with him, that morally considered both the knight and his lady are bad characters, and that each exhibits an example which ought not to be followed. The man dissembles in a way that would have justified the woman had she renounced him ; and the woman resolves to follow him at the expense of delicacy, propriety, and even modesty itself. But when the critic calls it a dull dialogue, who but a critic will believe him ? There are few readers of poetry of either sex, in this country, who cannot remember how that enchanting piece has bewitched them, who do not know, that instead of finding it tedious, they have been so delighted with the romantic turn of it, as to have overlooked all its defects, and to have given it a consecrated place in their memories, without ever feeling it a burthen. I wonder almost, that, as the Bacchanals served Orpheus, the boys and girls do not tear this husky, - dry commentator limb from limb, in resentment of such an injury done to their darling poet. I admire - Johnson as a man of great erudition and sense ; but when he sets himself up for a judge of writers upon the subject of love, a passion which I suppose he never felt in his life, he might as well think himself qualified to pronounce upon a treatise on horsemanship, or the art of fortification.

Mrs. Powley having given us reason when she was here to expect her this next spring, your mother

has already sent her an invitation, which we suppose she will accept.

We are glad that you are John's tutor; you never, I suppose, had so teachable a pupil. He certainly could never have found so proper a master. May he prove hereafter, by becoming all that you can wish him to be, that neither you nor I were mistaken when we gave the preference to a private education.

Mr. Smith having sent me, with a parcel of franks, a note in which he most obligingly invited me to draw upon him for that commodity, I soon after used the liberty he gave me, and received as obliging an answer.

The next packet I receive will bring me, I imagine, the last proof-sheet of my volume, which will consist of about three hundred and fifty pages honestly printed. My public *entrée*, therefore is not far distant.

Your mother joins with me in love to yourself and all at Stock.—Yours, *mon ami*,      Wm. COWPER.

Had we known that the last cheeses were naught, we would not have sent you these. Your mother has, however, inquired for and found a better dairy, which she means shall furnish you with cheese another year.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Jan. 13, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having just read yours, I begin to answer it; the basket presenting me with a fair opportunity to save a frank, and my time being entirely at my own disposal, which possibly may not

be the case to-morrow. As to Johnson, he sometimes promises fair, and proceeds with tolerable despatch, so that I begin to flatter myself with the hope of a speedy publication; then comes an interval of three weeks perhaps, and nothing done. It is a fortnight this day since I returned his last packet, and though one more cover may contain all that is yet behind, I know not but another week at least may elapse before he sends it. Then we are to begin again, and the whole is to undergo a second revisal, which, if it proceeds as slowly as the first, will cost another year. In the meanwhile, having some, though not the keenest, feelings of an author, I am not always very well pleased. I suspect that he gives a preference to others who engaged him not so early as myself, and that my distance from the spot is used to my disadvantage. But having other and much weightier cares and concerns to carry, I presently discharge my shoulders of this, and am but little incumbered by it. If it should fall in your way to ask him what he intends, or whether he does not think that we are in some danger of losing the season, considering how much remains to be done, I shall be obliged to you for putting the question to him.

Your answer respecting *Aetna*<sup>1</sup> is quite satisfactory, and gives me much pleasure. I hate altering, though I never refuse the task when propriety seems to enjoin it; and an alteration in this instance, if I am not mistaken, would have been singularly difficult. Indeed, when a piece has been finished two or three years, and an author finds occasion to amend, or make an addition to it, it is not easy to fall upon

<sup>1</sup> See letters of Dec. 17 and Dec. 31.

the very vein from which he drew his ideas in the first instance ; but either a different turn of thought, or expression, will betray the patch, and convince a reader of discernment that it has been cobbled and vamped.

I believe I did not thank you for your anecdotes, either foreign or domestic, in my last, therefore I do it now ; and still feel myself, as I did at the time, truly obliged to you for them. More is to be learned from one matter of fact than from a thousand speculations. But, alas ! what course can government take ? I have heard (for I never made the experiment) that if a man grasp a red-hot iron with his naked hand, it will stick to him, so that he cannot presently disengage himself from it. Such are the colonies in the hands of administration. While they hold them they burn their fingers, and yet they must not quit them. I know not whether your sentiments and mine upon this part of the subject exactly coincide, but you will know, when you understand what mine are. It appears to me, that the King is bound, both by the duty he owes to himself and to his people, to consider himself with respect to every inch of his territories, as a trustee deriving his interest in them from God, and invested with them by divine authority for the benefit of his subjects. As he may not sell them or waste them, so he may not resign them to an enemy, or transfer his right to govern them to any, not even to themselves, so long as it is possible for him to keep it. If he does, he betrays at once his own interest and that of his other dominions. It may be said, suppose Providence has ordained that they shall be wrested from him, how then ? I answer, that cannot appear to be the case, till God's

purpose is actually accomplished ; and in the mean time the most probable prospect of such an event does not release him from his obligation to hold them to the last moment, forasmuch as adverse appearances are no infallible indication of God's designs, but may give place to more comfortable symptoms, when we least expect it. Viewing the thing in this light, if I sat on his Majesty's throne, I should be as obstinate as he ; because if I quitted the contest, while I had any means left of carrying it on, I should never know that I had not relinquished what I might have retained, or be able to render a satisfactory answer to the doubts and inquiries of my own conscience.

I am rather pleased that you have adopted other sentiments respecting our intended present to the critical Doctor. I allow him to be a man of gigantic talents and most profound learning, nor have any doubts about the universality of his knowledge. But by what I have seen of his animadversions on the poets, I feel myself much disposed to question, in many instances, either his candour or his taste. He finds fault too often, like a man that, having sought it very industriously, is at last obliged to stick it upon a pin's point, and look at it through a microscope ; and I am sure I could easily convict him of having denied many beauties, and overlooked more. Whether his judgment be in itself defective, or whether it be warped by collateral considerations, a writer upon such subjects as I have chosen would probably find but little mercy at his hands.

We are truly sorry to hear you speak so doubtfully of your journey hither, and hope a substitute will be found : are thankful for a sight of your new

convert's letter, and hope it will prove the harbinger of many yet unborn. The sugar has arrived safe, and Mrs. Unwin thanks Mrs. Newton for her care of it. Poor Peggy! one would have hoped she might have been safe from such a *rencontre* in an hospital. We are glad, however, that she is better. Be pleased to remember us to Sally.

Mr. Scott will be upon the road to-morrow. Our love to you both, and to the young Euphrosyne;<sup>1</sup> the old lady of that name being long since dead, if she pleases she shall fill her vacant office, and be my Muse hereafter.—Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Jan. 17, 1782.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—I am glad we agree in our opinion of King Critic,<sup>2</sup> and the writers on whom he has bestowed his animadversions. It is a matter of indifference to me whether I think with the world at large or not, but I wish my friends to be of my mind. The same work will wear a different appearance in the eyes of the same man, according to the different views with which he reads it; if merely for his amusement, his candour being in less danger of a twist from interest or prejudice, he is pleased with what is really pleasing, and is not over curious to discover a blemish, because the exercise of a minute exactness is not consistent with his purpose. But if he once becomes a critic by trade, the case is altered. He must then at any rate establish, if he can, an opinion in every mind of his uncommon

<sup>1</sup> See letter of July 7, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Johnson.

discernment, and his exquisite taste. This great end he can never accomplish by thinking in the track that has been beaten under the hoof of public judgment. He must endeavour to convince the world that their favourite authors have more faults than they are aware of, and such as they have never suspected. Having marked out a writer universally esteemed, whom he finds it for that very reason convenient to depreciate and traduce, he will overlook some of his beauties, he will faintly praise others, and in such a manner as to make thousands, more modest, though quite as judicious as himself, question whether they are beauties at all. Can there be a stronger illustration of all that I have said than the severity of Johnson's remarks upon Prior; I might have said the injustice? His reputation as an author who, with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease, stood unshaken till Johnson thrust his head against it. And how does he attack him in this his principal fort? I cannot recollect his very words, but I am much mistaken indeed if my memory fails me with respect to the purport of them. 'His words,' he says, 'appear to be forced into their proper places; there indeed we find them, but find likewise that their arrangement has been the effect of constraint, and that without violence they would certainly have stood in a different order.' By your leave, most learned Doctor, this is the most disingenuous remark I ever met with, and would have come with a better grace from Curr<sup>1</sup> or Dennis.<sup>2</sup> Every man conversant with verse-writing

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Curr (1675-1747), the famous London bookseller, whose quarrels with Pope form so interesting a chapter in literary history.

<sup>2</sup> John Dennis (1657-1734), a critic ridiculed by Swift and Pope.

knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic—to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original. And now to tell us, after we and our fathers have admired him for it so long, that he is an easy writer indeed, but that his ease has an air of stiffness in it, in short, that his ease is not ease, but only something like it, what is it but a self-contradiction, an observation that grants what it is just going to deny, and denies what it has just granted, in the same sentence, and in the same breath? But I have filled the greatest part of my sheet with a very uninteresting subject. I will only say, that as a nation we are not much indebted, in point of poetical credit, to this too sagacious and unmerciful judge; and that for myself in particular, I have reason to rejoice that he entered upon and exhausted the labours of his office before my poor volume could possibly become an object of them. By the way, you cannot have a book at the time you mention; I have lived a fortnight or more in expectation of the last sheet, which is not yet arrived.

You have already furnished John's memory with by far the greatest part of what a parent would wish

to store it with. If all that is merely trivial, and all that has an immoral tendency, were expunged from our English poets, how would they shrink, and how would some of them completely vanish! I believe there are some of Dryden's *Fables* which he would find very entertaining; they are for the most part fine compositions, and not above his apprehension; but Dryden has written few things that are not blotted here and there with an unchaste allusion, so that you must pick his way for him, lest he should tread in the dirt. You did not mention Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, which I remember being so charmed with when I was a boy that I was never weary of them. There are even passages in the paradisiacal part of the *Paradise Lost* which he might study with advantage. And to teach him, as you can, to deliver some of the fine orations made in the Pandæmonium, and those between Satan, Ithuriel, and Zephon, with emphasis, dignity, and propriety, might be of great use to him hereafter. The sooner the ear is formed, and the organs of speech are accustomed to the various inflections of the voice, which the rehearsal of those passages demands, the better. I should think, too, that Thomson's *Seasons* might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing and a philosophical turn. I do not forget that he is but a child. But I remember that he is a child favoured with talents superior to his years. We were much pleased with his remarks on your almsgiving, and doubt not but it will be verified with respect to the two guineas you sent us, which have made four Christian people

happy. Ships I have none, nor have touched a pencil these three years; if ever I take it up again, which I rather suspect I shall not (the employment requiring stronger eyes than mine), it shall be at John's service.—Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—The modest terms in which you express yourself on the subject of Lady Austen's commendation embolden me to add my suffrage to hers, and to confirm it by assuring you that I think her just and well founded in her opinion of you. The compliment indeed glances at myself; for were you less than she accounts you, I ought not to afford you that place in my esteem which you have held so long. My own sagacity therefore and discernment are not a little concerned upon the occasion, for either you resemble the picture, or I have strangely mistaken my man, and formed an erroneous judgment of his character. With respect to your face and figure, indeed, there I leave the ladies to determine, as being naturally best qualified to decide the point; but whether you are perfectly the man of sense, and the gentleman, is a question in which I am as much interested as they, and which, you being my friend, I am of course prepared to settle in your favour.

That lady (whom, when you know her as well, you will love as much as we do) is, and has been during the last fortnight, a part of our family. Before she was perfectly restored to health, she.

<sup>1</sup> This letter is undated, but must have been written before the first quarrel with Lady Austen. See pp. 439-40.

returned to Clifton. Soon after she came back, Mr. Jones had occasion to go to London. No sooner was he gone, than the *Chateau*,<sup>1</sup> being left without a garrison, was besieged as regularly as the night came on. Villains were both heard and seen in the garden, and at the doors and windows. The kitchen window in particular was attempted, from which they took a complete pane of glass, exactly opposite to the iron by which it was fastened; but providentially the window had been nailed to the wood-work, in order to keep it close, and that the air might be excluded; thus they were disappointed, and, being discovered by the maid, withdrew. The ladies being worn out with continual watching, and repeated alarms, were at last prevailed upon to take refuge with us. Men furnished with firearms were put into the house, and the rascals, having intelligence of this circumstance, beat a retreat. Mr. Jones returned; Mrs. Jones and Miss Green,<sup>2</sup> her daughter, left us, but Lady Austen's spirits having been too much disturbed to be able to repose in a place where she had been so much terrified, she was left behind. She remains with us till her lodgings at the vicarage can be made ready for her reception. I have now sent you what has occurred of moment in our history since my last.

I say amen, with all my heart, to your observation on religious characters. Men who profess themselves adepts in mathematical knowledge, in

<sup>1</sup> Clifton Reynes Rectory.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Ann Green, the lady to whom Cowper sent the lines which accompanied a present of two 'coxcombs.' See *The Unpublished and Uncollected Poems of William Cowper* (1900). She married Dr. Grindon of Olney.

astronomy, or jurisprudence, are generally as well qualified as they would appear. The reason may be, that they are always liable to detection, should they attempt to impose upon mankind, and therefore take care to be what they pretend. In religion alone, a profession is often slightly taken up, and slovenly carried on, because forsooth candour and charity require us to hope the best, and to judge favourably of our neighbour, and because it is easy to deceive the ignorant, who are a great majority, upon this subject. Let a man attach himself to a particular party, contend furiously for what are properly called evangelical doctrines, and enlist himself under the banner of some popular preacher, and the business is done. Behold a Christian! a Saint! a Phoenix! In the mean time perhaps his heart, and his temper, and even his conduct, are unsanctified; possibly less exemplary than those of some avowed infidels. No matter!—he can talk—he has the Shibboleth of the true church—the Bible in his pocket, and a head well stored with notions. But the quiet, humble, modest, and peaceable person, who is in his practice what the other is only in his profession, who hates a noise, and therefore makes none, who, knowing the snares that are in the world, keeps himself as much out of it as he can, and never enters it, but when duty calls, and even then with fear and trembling, is the Christian that will always stand highest in the estimation of those, who bring all characters to the test of true wisdom, and judge of the tree by its fruit.

You are desirous of visiting the prisoners; you wish to administer to their necessities, and to give them instruction. This task you will undertake,

though you expect to encounter many things in the performance of it, that will give you pain. Now *this* I can understand; you will not listen to the sensibilities that distress yourself, but to the distresses of others. Therefore, when I meet with one of the specious praters above-mentioned, I will send him to Stock, that by your diffidence he may be taught a lesson of modesty; by your generosity, a little feeling for others; and by your general conduct, in short, to chatter less, and to do more.

We pity Mrs. Unwin under her sufferings from the toothache. Our best love to her and to her sister. Your little ones, with John the great at their head, have always an affectionate share of our remembrances.—Yours, my dear friend, Wm. C.

## TO JOSEPH HILL

*Jan. 31, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Having thanked you for a barrel of very fine oysters, I should have nothing more to say, if I did not determine to say every thing that may happen to occur. The political world affords us no very agreeable subjects at present, nor am I sufficiently conversant with it to do justice to so magnificent a theme, if it did. A man that lives as I do, whose chief occupation, at this season of the year, is to walk ten times in a day from the fireside to his cucumber frame and back again, cannot show his wisdom more, if he has any wisdom to show, than by leaving the mysteries of government to the management of persons, in point of situation and information, much better qualified for the business. Suppose not, however,

that I am perfectly an unconcerned spectator, or that I take no interest at all in the affairs of my country; far from it—I read the news—I see that things go wrong in every quarter. I meet, now and then, with an account of some disaster that seems to be the indisputable progeny of treachery, cowardice, or a spirit of faction; I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought me the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal,<sup>1</sup> how did I leap for joy! When Hawke<sup>2</sup> demolished Conflans I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec.<sup>3</sup> I am not, therefore, I suppose, destitute of true patriotism, but the course of public events has, of late, afforded me no opportunity to exert it. I cannot rejoice, because I see no reason, and I will not murmur, because for that I can find no good one. And let me add, he that has seen both sides of fifty has lived to little purpose if he has not other views of the world than he had when he was much younger. He finds, if he reflects at all, that it will be to the end, what it has been from the beginning, a shifting, uncertain,

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Boscawen (1711-1761) defeated the French fleet near Lagos, south of Portugal, 18th August 1759.

<sup>2</sup> Admiral Hawke (1705-1781) defeated M. de Conflans in Quiberon Bay, 20th November 1759.

<sup>3</sup> James Wolfe (1727-1759), the General who defeated Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham, 13th September 1759.

fluctuating scene ; that nations, as well as individuals, have their seasons of infancy, youth, and age. If he be an Englishman, he will observe that ours, in particular, is affected with every symptom of decay, and is already sunk into a state of decrepitude. I am reading Mrs. Macaulay's<sup>1</sup> History. I am not quite such a superannuated simpleton as to suppose that mankind were wiser or much better when I was young than they are now. But I may venture to assert, without exposing myself to the charge of dotage, that the men whose integrity, courage, and wisdom, broke the bands of tyranny, established our constitution upon its true basis, and gave a people, overwhelmed with the scorn of all countries, an opportunity to emerge into a state of the highest respect and estimation, make a better figure in history than any of the present day are likely to do, when their pretty harangues are forgotten, and nothing shall survive but the remembrance of the views and motives with which they made them.

My dear friend, I have written at random in every sense, neither knowing what sentiments I should broach when I began, nor whether they would accord with yours. Excuse a rustic if he errs on such a subject, and believe me sincerely yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO JOSEPH JOHNSON, BOOKSELLER

*Jan. 31, 1782.*

SIR,—You will find your two queries satisfied by the correction of the press.

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Macaulay (1733-1791). The first volume of her *History of England (1688-1715)* appeared in 1763.

P. 338. Though perhaps the exactest rhymes may not be required in these lighter pieces, I yet choose to be as regular in this particular as I can; I have therefore displaced half a stanza, for the sake of introducing better. You will observe that I have made some other corrections, which though they be for the most part but a letter or a stop, were yet such as were very necessary either with regard to the expression or the sense.—I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

W M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 2, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Though I value your correspondence highly on its own account, I certainly value it the more in consideration of the many difficulties under which you carry it on. Having so many other engagements, and engagements so much more worthy of your attention, I ought to esteem it, as I do, a singular proof of your friendship, that you so often make an opportunity to bestow a letter upon me; and this, not only because mine, which I write in a state of mind not very favourable to religious contemplations, are never worth your reading, but especially because, while you consult my gratification and endeavour to amuse my melancholy, your thoughts are forced out of the only channel in which they delight to flow, and constrained into another so different and so little interesting to a mind like yours, that but for me, and for my sake, they would perhaps never visit it. Though I should be glad therefore to hear from you

every week, I do not complain that I enjoy that privilege but once in a fortnight, but am rather happy to be indulged in it so often.

I thank you for the jog you gave Johnson's elbow; communicated from him to the printer it has produced me two more sheets, and two more will bring the business, I suppose, to a conclusion. I sometimes feel such a perfect indifference with respect to the public opinion of my book, that I am ready to flatter myself no censure of reviewers, or other critical readers, would occasion me the smallest disturbance. But not feeling myself constantly possessed of this desirable apathy, I am sometimes apt to suspect that it is not altogether sincere, or at least that I may lose it just in the moment when I may happen most to want it. Be it however as it may, I am still persuaded that it is not in their power to mortify me much. I have intended well, and performed to the best of my ability;—so far was right, and this is a boast of which they cannot rob me. If they condemn my poetry, I must even say with Cervantes, 'Let them do better if they can!';—if my doctrine, they judge that which they do not understand; I shall except to the jurisdiction of the court, and plead, *Coram non judice*. Even Horace could say, he should neither be the plumper for the praise, nor the leaner for the condemnation of his readers; and it will prove me wanting to myself indeed, if, supported by so many sublimer considerations than he was master of, I cannot sit loose to popularity, which, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth, and is equally out of our command. If you, and two or three more such as you, say, well done! it ought to give me more contentment than

if I could earn Churchill's laurels, and by the same means.

Mr. Raban has spent an hour with us since he received your last, but did not mention it. We are not of his privy council. He knows our sentiments upon some subjects too well to favour us with a very intimate place in his confidence. He is civil indeed, at least not intentionally otherwise, and this is all we can say of him. Some people in our circumstances would hardly say so much. As soon as he is seated, he stretches out his legs at their full length, crosses his feet, folds his arms, reclines his head upon his shoulder, yawns frequently, seems not unwilling to hear and to be entertained, but never opens a subject himself, or assists the conversation with any remarks. This is not always pleasing.

George Mayne,<sup>1</sup> whom I suppose you remember, a farmer that lived on the beautiful side of a hill in Weston parish, died last week. If you recollect the man, you recollect too that he made it his principal glory to believe that he and his two mastiffs would come to one and the same conclusion, and that no part of either would survive the grave. Mr. Page attended him, preached his funeral sermon, and informed the largest congregation ever seen at Weston that he converted him. I cannot learn, however, that any competent judge of the matter has given the tale a moment's credit, or that any better proof of this wonder has been produced, than that poor George desired to be buried in his pew, to make some amends, I suppose, for having never visited — it while he lived.—Yours, my dear sir, W. C.

<sup>1</sup> George Mayne was buried, 27th Jan. 1782.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*Feb. 9, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I thank you for Mr. Lowth's verses. They are so good, that had I been present when he spoke them, I should have trembled for the boy, lest the man should disappoint the hopes such early genius had given birth to. It is not common to see so lively a fancy so correctly managed, and so free from irregular exuberances, at so unexperienced an age; fruitful, yet not wanton, and gay without being tawdry. When schoolboys write verse, if they have any fire at all, it generally spends itself in flashes, and transient sparks, which may indeed suggest an expectation of something better hereafter, but deserve not to be much commended for any real merit of their own. Their wit is generally forced, and false, and their sublimity, if they affect any, bombast. I remember well when it was thus with me, and when a turgid, noisy, unmeaning speech in a tragedy, which I should now laugh at, afforded me raptures, and filled me with wonder. It is not in general till reading and observation have settled the taste that we can give the prize to the best writing, in preference to the worst. Much less are we able to execute what is good ourselves. But Lowth seems to have stepped into excellence at once, and to have gained by intuition, what we little folks are happy, if we can learn at last, after much labour of our own, and instruction of others. The compliments he pays to the memory of King Charles, he would probably now retract, though he be a Bishop, and his Majesty's zeal for episcopacy was one of the causes of his ruin. An age or two must pass, before

some characters can be properly understood. The spirit of party employs itself in veiling their faults, and ascribing to them virtues which they never possessed. See Charles's face drawn by Clarendon, and it is a handsome portrait. See it more justly exhibited by Mrs. Macaulay, and it is deformed to a degree that shocks us. Every feature expresses cunning, employing itself in the attainment of tyranny ; and dissimulation, pretending itself an advocate for truth.

I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship, disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it.

My letters have already apprised you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady<sup>1</sup> you visited in Queen Ann Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained,

<sup>1</sup> Lady Austen.

before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it : conscious of none but the most upright inoffensive intentions, I yet apologised for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time, but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end, but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence ; it received indeed an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to ; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting ; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion, and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety, she is a great thinker), induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to

open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister.—*Ceu fumus in auras.*

I thank you for the search you have made after my intended motto, but I no longer need it. I have left myself no room for politics; that subject therefore must be postponed to a future letter. Our love is always with yourself and family. We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the fracas above mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprise you of this quarrel sooner, but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit.—Yours, my dear friend,      W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*Feb. 16, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Lest the grumbling strain of my last should have an effect upon you which I did not intend, and occasion you another journey to Johnson's in order that you might inspire him with a little more alacrity in his work, I now write to inform you that he has, for the present at least, silenced all my complaints, by sending me the whole book except the two last sheets, which he gives me reason to expect to-morrow. When I have returned the

parcel, which I mean to do by the diligence on Monday, this tedious business, so far as I am concerned in it, will be over; nothing more will then be requisite but to keep the press going till the number he designs are printed, which I suppose will demand no great length of time, as I have heard that the expedition with which they can work off a book, when the press is once set, is wonderful.

Caraccioli says—‘There is something very bewitching in authorship, and that he who has once written will write again.’ It may be so, I can subscribe to the former part of his assertion from my own experience, having never found an amusement, among the many I have been obliged to have recourse to, that so well answered the purpose for which I used it. The quieting and composing effect of it was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future (those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times), had any longer a share in my contemplation. For this reason I wish, and have often wished since the fit left me, that it would seize me again; but hitherto I have wished it in vain. I see no want of subjects, but I feel a total disability to discuss them. Whether it is thus with other writers or not, I am ignorant, but I should suppose my case in this respect a little peculiar. The voluminous writers at least, whose vein of fancy seems always to have been rich in proportion to their occasions, cannot have been so unlike and so unequal to themselves. There is this difference between my poetship and the generality of *them*,—they have been ignorant how much they have stood indebted to an Almighty

power, for the exercise of those talents they have supposed their own; whereas I know, and know most perfectly, and am perhaps to be taught it to the last, that my power to think, whatever it be, and consequently my power to compose is, as much as my outward form, afforded to me by the same hand that makes me in any respect to differ from a brute. This lesson, if not constantly inculcated, might perhaps be forgotten, or at least too slightly remembered—an evil of which I am in no danger; for if all that ancient mythologists have invented of a forked hill, a fountain, a god of verse, and his verse inspiring—*caetera desunt.*

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Feb. 24, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—If I should receive a letter from you to-morrow, you must still remember that I am not in your debt, having paid you by anticipation. Knowing that you take an interest in my publication, and that you have waited for it with some impatience, I write to inform you that, if it is possible for a printer to be punctual, I shall come forth on the first of March. I have ordered two copies to Stock; one for Mr. John Unwin. It is possible, after all, that my book may come forth without a Preface. Mr. Newton has written (he could indeed write no other), a very sensible as well as a very friendly one; and it is printed. But the bookseller, who knows him well, and esteems him highly, is anxious to have it cancelled, and, with my consent first obtained, has offered to negotiate that

matter with the author. He judges, that, though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane, and that there is in reality no need of any Preface at all. I have found Johnson a very judicious man on other occasions, and am therefore willing that he should determine for me upon this.

Having imparted to you an account of the fracas between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that incident. The day before yesterday, she sent me by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones,<sup>1</sup> three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged, and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet. This likewise she had previous reason given to expect. Thus stands the affair at present; whether any thing in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship, has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper too apt to take it, is unfavourable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connexions, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighbourhood, Lady

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas Jones, curate of Clifton Reynes.

Peterborough and Miss Mordaunt are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight; it is in still life alone that we look for that measure of happiness we can rationally expect below. What have we to do therefore, with characters like these? shall we go to the dancing-school again? shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanour, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them to none, but to people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world, and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer—*Monsieur et Madame ne sont pas visibles.*

There are but few persons to whom I present my book. The Lord Chancellor is one. I enclose in a packet I send by this post to Johnson a letter to his Lordship which will accompany the volume; and to you I enclose a copy of it, because I know you will have a friendly curiosity to see it. An author is an important character. Whatever his merits may be, the mere circumstance of authorship warrants his approach to persons, whom otherwise perhaps he could hardly address without being deemed impertinent. He can do me no good. If I should happen to do him a little, I shall be a greater man than he. I have ordered a copy likewise to Mr. Robert Smith.

Lord Sandwich has been hard run, but I consider

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the push that has been made to displace him as the effort of a faction, rather than as the struggle of true patriotism convinced of his delinquency, and desirous to sacrifice him to the interests of the country. Without public virtue public prosperity cannot be long lived, and where must we look for it? It seems indeed to have a share in the motives that animate one or two of the popular party; but grant them sincere, which is a very charitable concession, the rest are evidently naught, and the quantity of salt is too small to season the mass.

I hope John continues to be pleased, and to give pleasure. If he loves instruction, he has a tutor who can give him plentifully of what he loves; and with his natural abilities his progress must be such as you would wish. Our love to all the family.—  
Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

*February, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is not possible for me, as it used to be, to answer a Sunday's letter by the return of the post. It goes out before it comes in. A new and very inconvenient regulation. I am now obliged to get all my despatches ready by nine or ten in the morning. Methinks I express myself like a secretary of state.

I enclose Johnson's upon the subject of the Preface, and would send you my reply to it if I had kept a copy. This, however, was the purport of it. That Mr. Bates, whom I described as you described him to me, had made a similar objection,

but that being willing to hope, that two or three pages of sensible matter, well expressed, might possibly go down, though of a religious cast, I was resolved to believe him mistaken, and to pay no regard to it. That *his* judgment, however, who by his occupation is bound to understand what will promote the sale of a book, and what will hinder it, seemed to deserve more attention. That, therefore, according to his own offer, written on a small slip of paper now lost, I should be obliged to *him* if he would state his difficulties to you: adding, that I need not inform *him*, who is so well acquainted with you, that he would find you easy to be persuaded to sacrifice, if necessary, what you had written to the interests of the book. I find he has had an interview with you upon the occasion, and your behaviour in it has verified my prediction. What course he determines upon I do not know, nor am I at all anxious about it. It is impossible for me, however, to be so insensible of your kindness in writing the Preface, as not to be desirous of defying all contingencies rather than entertain a wish to suppress it. It will do me honour in the eyes of those whose good opinion is indeed an honour, and if it hurts me in the estimation of others, I cannot help it; the fault is neither yours nor mine, but theirs. If a minister's is a more splendid character than a poet's, and I think nobody that understands their value can hesitate in deciding that question, then undoubtedly the advantage of having our names united in the same volume is all on my side:—but to say truth, though I may find a transient amusement, I have no sincere pleasure in any thing.

Sufficient care is taken by my nightly instructors — that I shall not forget my whereabouts. Reminded as I am continually, and always knowing it to be true, that I am a foreigner to the system I inhabit, — I cannot, if I would, deceive myself into an opinion that I have any real interest in anything here. I know that this persuasion would be thought sufficient evidence of frenzy were it produced before a jury under a commission of lunacy; but it is not the less a fact, neither is it to me the least distressing part of it, that it is a fact of which I can convince nobody, because though convinced myself, it is impossible I should produce any proof of it; but let this pass—it will be known in due time.

We thank you for the Fast-sermon. I had not read two pages before I exclaimed—The man has read *Expostulation!* But though there is a strong resemblance between the two pieces in point of matter, and sometimes the very same expressions are to be met with, yet I soon recollect that, on such a theme, a striking coincidence of both might happen without a wonder. I doubt not that it is the production of an honest man, it carries with it an air of sincerity and zeal that is not easily counterfeited. But though I can see no reason why kings should not sometimes hear of their faults as well as other men, I think I see many good ones why they should not be reproved so publicly. It can hardly be done with that respect which is due to their office on the part of the author, or without encouraging a spirit of unmannerly censure in his readers. His majesty, too, perhaps might answer—‘ My own personal failings and offences

I am ready to confess; but were I to follow your advice, and cashier the profligate from my service, where must I seek men of faith, and true Christian piety, qualified by nature and by education to succeed them?' Business must be done, men of business alone can do it, and *good* men are rarely found under that description. When Nathan reproved David, he did not employ a herald, or accompany his charge with the sound of the trumpet; nor can I think the writer of this sermon quite justifiable in exposing the king's faults in the sight of the people.

These two last posts our news has failed us. This has occasioned our hiring one, and has given us an opportunity to discover that we can be furnished at Olney with six *Morning Chronicles* in the week for three shillings and threepence a quarter. We shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will pay our London newsmonger, and tell him we have no further need of him.

Daniel Raban<sup>1</sup> has levelled and gravelled the market hill, and because water is scarce at Olney, has put the parish to the expense of a town pump, and designs, in order that people may not run their heads against it in the night, to crown it with a lamp. As the people here are not so rich as to be able to afford superfluities, this measure does not give universal satisfaction. I subjoin the only verses I have written for some time, which, however, are not to be published. The pump stands opposite Banister's door.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baker of Olney.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Banister lived next door to what is now the Post Office, on the Cowper's House side.

Let Banister now lend his aid  
To furnish shoes for the Baker,  
Who has put down a pump, with a lamp on its head,  
For the use of the said Shoe-maker.

Many thanks for the tongues and the nuts: one of the latter is remarkably fine. The money shall be paid as directed. I enclose a list of my gifted readers, that you may not purchase for those to whom I intend a present. I shall send Lord Dartmouth a card by the present post.—We are as ever yours and Mrs. Newton's,

Wm. COWPER.

My coach is full. Mr. Jones cannot have a place in it till next time.

TO LORD THURLOW<sup>1</sup>

*Olney, Bucks, Feb. 25, 1782.*

MY LORD,—I make no apology for what I account a duty; I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship should I send a volume into the world, and forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your Lordship upon that occasion. When we parted you little thought of hearing from me again; and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

Among the pieces I have the honour to send, there is one for which I must entreat your pardon. I mean that of which your Lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost

<sup>1</sup> Edward Thurlow (1731-1806), first Baron Thurlow; Lord Chancellor 1778-1792.

spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connexion that did me so much honour.

As to the rest, their merits, if they have any, and their defects, which are probably more than I am aware of, will neither of them escape your notice. But where there is much discernment there is generally much candour; and I commit myself into your Lordship's hands with the less anxiety, being well acquainted with yours.

If my first visit, after so long an interval, should prove neither a troublesome nor a dull one, but especially if not altogether an unprofitable one, *omne tuli punctum.*

I have the honour to be, though with very different impressions of some subjects, yet with the same sentiments of affection and esteem as ever,  
your Lordship's faithful, and most obedient, humble  
servant,

W. C.

Cowper's first Volume of Poems was published on March 1st, 1782.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 6, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The tempting occasion of a basket directed to you seldom fails to produce a letter; not that I have anything to say, but because I can say any thing, therefore I seize the present opportunity to address you. Some subject will be sure to present itself, and the first that offers shall be welcome.

Is peace the nearer because our patriots have resolved that it is desirable? Will the victory they have gained in the House of Commons be attended

with any other consequences than the mortification of the King, the embarrassment of ministry, and perhaps Lord North's<sup>1</sup> resignation? Do they expect the same success on other occasions, and having once gained a majority, are they to be the majority for ever? These are the questions we agitate by the fireside in an evening, without being able to come to any certain conclusion, partly, I suppose, because the subject is in itself uncertain, and partly because we are not furnished with the means of understanding it. I find the politics of times past far more intelligible than those of the present. Time has thrown light upon what was obscure, and decided what was ambiguous. The characters of great men, which are always mysterious while they live, are ascertained by the faithful historian, and sooner or later receive their wages of fame or infamy, according to their true deserts. How have I seen sensible and learned men burn incense to the memory of Oliver Cromwell, ascribing to him, as the greatest hero of the world, the dignity of the British empire during the interregnum. A century passed before that idol, which seemed to be of gold, was proved to be a wooden one. The fallacy, however, was at length detected, and the honour of that detection has fallen to the share of a woman. I do not know whether you have read Mrs. Macaulay's history of that period. She handled him more roughly than the Scots did at the battle of Dunbar, where, though he gained a victory, he received a wound in his head that had almost made it his last,

<sup>1</sup> Lord North (1732-1792) was Prime Minister from 1770 to 1782, and was largely responsible for the policy that lost Great Britain her American Colonies.

and spoiled him for a Protector. He would have thought it little worth his while to have broken through all obligations, divine and human, to have wept crocodile tears, and wrapped himself up in the obscurity of speeches that nobody could understand, could he have foreseen that in the ensuing century a lady's scissors would clip his laurels close, and expose his naked villainy to the scorn of all posterity. This however has been accomplished, and so effectually, that I suppose it is not in the power of the most artificial management to make them grow again. Even the sagacious of mankind are blind when Providence leaves them to be deluded; so blind, that a tyrant shall be mistaken for a true patriot, true patriots (such were the Long Parliament) shall be abhorred as tyrants, and almost a whole nation shall dream that they have the full enjoyment of liberty for years after such a crafty knave as Oliver shall have stolen it completely from them. I am indebted for all this show of historical knowledge to Mr. Bull, who has lent me five volumes of the work I mention. I was willing to display it while I have it; in a twelvemonth's time I shall remember almost nothing of the matter.

I wrote to Lord Dartmouth to apprise him of my intended present, and have received a very affectionate and obliging answer. But not having received the volume myself, I suppose it is not yet published, though the first of the month was the day fixed for the publication.

No winter since we knew Olney has kept us more closely confined than the present; either the ways have been so dirty or the weather so rough that we have not more than three times escaped into the

fields since last autumn. This does not suit Mrs. Unwin, to whom air and exercise, her only remedies, are almost absolutely necessary. Neither are my frequent calls into the garden altogether sufficient for me. Man, a changeable creature himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety as his proper element. A melancholy man at least is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walls, and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually.

Mrs. Unwin hopes the chickens will prove good, though not so fat as she generally makes them. She has sent the two guineas for the box, and I the layers and pinks I mentioned. When the bulbs are taken up at Michaelmas, Mrs. Newton shall receive a parcel of all the sorts. Though I have spoken of the utility of changes, we neither feel nor wish for any in our friendships, and consequently stand just where we did with respect to your whole self. Other friends than you we have none, nor expect any.—Yours, my dear sir,

Wm. COWPER.

The cocoa-nuts were equally good, and one of the tongues proved a very fine one; we have not dressed the other.

#### TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 7, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We have great pleasure in the contemplation of your Northern journey, as it promises us a sight of you and yours by the way, and are only sorry that Miss Shuttleworth cannot be of the party. A line to ascertain the hour when we

may expect you, by the next preceding post, will be welcome.

We are far from wishing a renewal of the connexion<sup>1</sup> we have lately talked about. We did indeed find it in a certain way an agreeable one while that lady continued in the country, yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan, with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression, but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally perhaps it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us, whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not; or rather whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think, however, that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to a disadvantage; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed

<sup>1</sup> With Lady Austen.

herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which, though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural, her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology.

It is not much for my advantage, that the printer delays so long to gratify your expectation. It is a state of mind that is apt to tire and disconcert us; and there are but few pleasures that make us amends for the pain of repeated disappointment. I take it for granted you have not received the volume, not having received it myself, nor indeed heard from Johnson, since he fixed the first of the month for its publication.

What a medley are our public prints, half the page filled with the ruin of the country, and the other half filled with the vices and pleasures of it;—here an island taken, and there a new comedy;—here an empire lost, and there an Italian opera, or the Duke of Gloucester's rout on a Sunday!

‘May it please your Royal Highness! I am an Englishman, and must stand or fall with the nation. Religion, its true Palladium, has been stolen away; and it is crumbling into dust. Sin ruins us, the sins of the great especially, and of their sins especially the violation of the Sabbath, because it is naturally productive of all the rest. Is it fit that a Prince

should make the Sabbath a day of dissipation, and that, not content with his own personal profanation of it, he should invite all whose rank entitles them to the honour of such distinction, to partake with him in his guilt? Are examples operative in proportion to the dignity of those who set them? Whose then more pernicious than your own in this flagrant instance of impiety? For shame, sir!—if you wish well to your brother's arms, and would be glad to see the kingdom emerging again from her ruins, pay more respect to an ordinance that deserves the deepest! I do not say pardon this short remonstrance!—The concern I feel for my country, and the interest I have in its prosperity, give me a right to make it. I am, etc.'

Thus one might write to his Highness, and (I suppose) might be as profitably employed in whistling the tune of an old ballad. Lord Plymouth had a rout too on the same day.—Is he the son of that Plymouth, who bought *Punch* for a hundred pounds, and having kept him a week, tore him limb from limb because he was sullen and would not speak?—Probably he is.

I have no copy of the Preface, nor do I know at present how Johnson and Mr. Newton have settled it. In the matter of it there was nothing offensively peculiar. But it was thought too pious.—Yours,  
my dear friend,

W. C.



TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

March 14, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I can only repeat what I said some time since, that the world is grown more foolish

and careless than it was when I had the honour of knowing it. Though your Preface was of a serious cast, it was yet free from every thing that might, with propriety, expose it to the charge of Methodism, being guilty of no offensive peculiarities, nor containing any of those obnoxious doctrines at which the world is so apt to be angry, and which we must give her leave to be angry at, because we know she cannot help it. It asserted nothing more than every rational creature must admit to be true,—‘that divine and earthly things can no longer stand in competition with each other, in the judgment of any man, than while he continues ignorant of their respective value; and that the moment the eyes are opened, the latter are always cheerfully relinquished for the sake of the former.’ Now I do most certainly remember the time when such a proposition as this would have been at least supportable, and when it would not have spoiled the market of any volume to which it had been prefixed; *ergo*—the times are altered for the worse.

I have reason to be very much satisfied with my publisher. He marked such lines as did not please him, and as often as I could, I paid all possible respect to his animadversions. You will accordingly find, at least if you recollect how they stood in the ms., that several passages are the better for having undergone his critical notice. Indeed I do not know where I could have found a bookseller who could have pointed out to me my defects with more discernment; and as I find it is a fashion for modern bards to publish the names of the literati, who have favoured their works with a revisal, would myself

most willingly have acknowledged my obligations to Johnson, and so I told him. I am to thank you likewise, and ought to have done it in the first place, for having recommended to me the suppression of some lines which I am now more than ever convinced would at least have done me no honour.

I was not unacquainted with Mr. Browne's<sup>1</sup> extraordinary case, before you favoured me with his letter and his intended dedication to the Queen, though I am obliged to you for a sight of those two curiosities, which I do not recollect to have ever seen till you sent them. I could, however, were it not a subject that would make us all melancholy, point out to you some essential differences between his state of mind and my own, which would prove mine to be by far the most deplorable of the two. I suppose no man would despair, if he did not apprehend something singular in the circumstances of his own story, something that discriminates it from that of every other man, and that induces despair as an inevitable consequence. You may encounter his unhappy persuasion with as many instances as you please, of persons who, like him, having renounced all hope, were yet restored; and may thence infer that he, like them, shall meet with a season of restoration—but it is in vain. Every such individual accounts himself an exception to all rules, and therefore the blessed reverse that others have experienced affords no ground of comfortable expectation to him. But you will say, it is reasonable to conclude

<sup>1</sup> Simon Browne was born about 1680 at Shepton Mallet in Somersetshire, and became minister of a meeting-house in Old Jewry. In 1723, owing to the loss of his wife and only son, he fell into deep melancholy; and believing that God had deserted him, he discontinued religious exercises and left the ministry. He died in 1732.

that all your predecessors in this vale of misery and horror have found themselves delightfully disappointed at last, so will you :—I grant the reasonableness of it; it would be sinful, perhaps, because uncharitable, to reason otherwise; but an argument, hypothetical in its nature, however rationally conducted, may lead to a false conclusion; and in this instance so will yours. But I forbear. For the cause above mentioned, I will say no more, though it is a subject on which I could write more than the mail would carry. I must deal with you as I deal with poor Mrs. Unwin, in all our disputes about it, cutting all controversy short by an appeal to the event.

MY DEAR MADAM,—We return you many thanks, in the first place for a pot of scallops excellently pickled, and in the second for the snuff-box. We admired it, even when we supposed the price of it two guineas; guess then with what raptures we contemplated it when we found that it cost but one. It was genteel before, but then it became a perfect model of elegance, and worthy to be the desire of all noses.

Your own hams not being dry, Mrs. Unwin begs your acceptance of one of hers, together with a couple of fowls, and would have sent some broccoli, but has none—a reason for not sending it, which, however to be lamented, must yet be allowed a satisfactory one.—Dear Madam, we are yours and sir's most affectionately and truly,

Wm. C. and M. U.

TO JOSEPH HILL

*March 14, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As servant maids, and such sort of folks, account a letter good for nothing, unless it begins with—This comes hoping you are well, as I am at this present; so I should be chargeable with a great omission, were I not to make frequent use of the following grateful exordium—Many thanks for a fine cod and oysters.—Your bounty never arrived more seasonably. I had just been observing that among other deplorable effects of the war, the scarcity of fish which it occasioned was severely felt at Olney; but your plentiful supply immediately reconciled me, though not to the war, yet to my small share in the calamities which it produces.

I hope my bookseller has paid due attention to the order I gave him to furnish you with my books. The composition of those pieces afforded me an agreeable amusement at intervals, for about a twelvemonth; and I should be glad to devote the leisure hours of another twelvemonth to the same occupation; at least, if my lucubrations should meet with a favourable acceptance. But I cannot write when I would; and whether I shall find readers, is a problem not yet decided. So the Muse and I are parted for the present.

I sent Lord Thurlow a volume, and a letter with it, which I communicate because you will undoubtedly have some curiosity to see it.—Yours,

WM. COWPER.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*March 18, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Nothing has given me so much pleasure, since the publication of my volume, as your favourable opinion of it. It may possibly meet with acceptance from hundreds, whose commendation would afford me no other satisfaction than what I should find in the hope that it might do them good. I have some neighbours in this place, who say they like it ;—doubtless I had rather they should than that they should not,—but I know them to be persons of no more taste in poetry, than skill in mathematics ; their applause therefore is a sound that has no music in it for me. But my vanity was not so entirely quiescent when I read your friendly account of the manner in which it had affected *you*. It was tickled and pleased, and told me in a pretty loud whisper, that others perhaps of whose taste and judgment I had a high opinion, would approve it too. As a giver of good counsel, I wish to please all ; as an author, I am perfectly indifferent to the judgment of all, except the few who are indeed judicious. The circumstance, however, in your letter which pleased me most was, that you wrote in high spirits, and though you said much, suppressed more, lest you should hurt my delicacy ; my delicacy is obliged to you,—but you observe it is not so squeamish, but that after it has feasted upon praise expressed, it can find a comfortable dessert in the contemplation of praise implied. I now feel as if I should be glad to begin another volume, but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to

take at present, and the season of the year brings with it so many avocations into the garden, where I am my own *fac totum*, that I have little or no leisure for the quill. I should do myself much wrong, were I to omit mentioning the great complacency with which I read your narrative of Mrs. Unwin's smiles and tears; persons of much sensibility are always persons of taste; a taste for poetry depends indeed upon that very article more than upon any other. If she had Aristotle by heart, I should not esteem her judgment so highly, were she defective in point of feeling, as I do and must esteem it, knowing her to have such feelings as Aristotle could not communicate, and as half the readers in the world are destitute of. This it is that makes me set so high a price upon your mother's opinion. She is a critic by nature, and not by rule, and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition that I never knew deceive her; insomuch, that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for the preference, in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one.

Whether I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not, is at present *in ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so particularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought, that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner as too insignificant for a statesman's notice, and never found till his executor finds them. This affair, however, is neither *ad my libitum* nor his. I have sent him the truth, and the truth which

I know he is ignorant of. He that put it into the heart of a certain eastern monarch, to amuse himself one sleepless night with listening to the records of his kingdom, is able to give birth to such another occasion in Lord Thurlow's instance, and inspire him with a curiosity to know what he has received from a friend he once loved and valued. If an answer comes, however, you shall not long be a stranger to the contents of it.

I have read your letter to their Worships, and much approve of it. May it have the effect it ought! If not, still you have acted an humane and becoming part, and the poor aching toes and fingers of the prisoners will not appear in judgment against you. I have made a slight alteration in the last sentence, which perhaps you will not disapprove. Our love is with you and your family.—

Yours ever,

W. C.

*P.S.* I shall beg you to be the carrier of a copy to Mrs. Powley. We expect your arrival with much eagerness.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*March 24, 1782.*

MY DEAR SIR,—If you had only commended me as a poet, I should have swallowed your praises whole, have smacked my lips, and made no reply; but as you offer me your friendship, and account me worthy of your affection, which I esteem a much greater honour than that of being a poet, though even approved by you, it seems necessary

that I should not be quite dumb upon so interesting an occasion.

Your letter gave me great pleasure, both as a testimony of your approbation and of your regard. I wrote in hopes of pleasing you, and such as you; and though I must confess that, at the same time,

- I cast a sidelong glance at the good liking of the world at large, I believe I can say it was more for the sake of their advantage and instruction
- than their praise. They are children: if we give them physic, we must sweeten the rim of the cup with honey. If my book is so far honoured as to be made a vehicle of true knowledge to any that are ignorant, I shall rejoice; and do already rejoice that it has procured me a proof of your esteem, whom I had rather please than all the writers of both Reviews.

When your leisure and your health will allow you to trot over to Olney, you will most assuredly be welcome to us both, and even welcome if you please to light your pipe with the page in question.  
—Yours, my dear friend, affectionately,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Tuesday morning.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Behold the plan of your future operations!<sup>1</sup> which, as I have told Mr. Newton, the man being found who is able to carry it into practice, ought not to be called Utopian. It must

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the founding at Newport Pagnell of an evangelical academy for young men destined for the ministry. Mr. Bull became the conductor of it.

be returned to London in the course of the next ten days, by you if you have opportunity to send it; if not, by me. In the latter case you will be so kind as to remit it to Olney in due season.

I have loaded Mr. Dumville<sup>1</sup> with your books, and return you many thanks for the use of them. Mr. Milner's gave me great pleasure, as a sensible, just, and temperate piece of argument. I only regret that, having it in his power to be perfectly correct in his expression, he should suffer any inaccuracies to escape him. Such mistakes in an advocate for the truth, however venial in others, are sure to be marked by the critics, and magnified to the disadvantage of his cause.

I heartily wish you many comfortable whiffs to-day, and every day, especially when you come to whiff in the green-house.—Yours, Wm. C.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*April 1, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I could not have found a better trumpeter. Your zeal to serve the interest of my volume, together with your extensive acquaintance, qualify you perfectly for that most useful office. Methinks I see you with the long tube at your mouth, proclaiming to your numerous connections my poetical merits, and at proper intervals levelling it at Olney, and pouring into my ear the welcome sound of their approbation. I need not encourage you to proceed, your breath will never fail in such a cause; and thus encouraged,

<sup>1</sup> The Olney carrier.

I myself perhaps may proceed also, and when the versifying fit returns produce another volume. Alas! we shall never receive such commendations from him on the woolsack, as your good friend has lavished upon us. He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since that I was going to publish; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer; for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was not so much as mentioned: whence I learn two lessons: first, that however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his; and secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgment of the favour I have conferred upon his lordship, either under his own hand, or by the means of a third person; and, consequently, that our intercourse has ceased for ever, for I shall not have such another opportunity to renew it. To make me amends, however, for this mortification, Mr. Newton tells me that my book is likely to run, spread, and prosper; that the grave cannot help smiling, and the gay are struck with the truth of it; and that it is likely to find its way into his Majesty's hands, being put into a proper course for that purpose. Now if the King should fall in love with my Muse, and with you for her sake, such an event would make us ample amends for the Chancellor's indifference, and you might be the first divine that ever reached a mitre from the shoulders of a poet. But, I believe, we must be content, I with my gains, if I gain anything, and you with the pleasure of knowing that I am a gainer.

Doubt not your abilities for the task which Johnson would recommend to you.<sup>1</sup> The Reviewers are such fiery Socinians that they have less charity for a man of my avowed principles than a Portuguese for a Jew. They may possibly find here and there somewhat to commend, but will undoubtedly reprobate the doctrines, pronounce me a Methodist, and by so doing probably check the sale of the volume, if not suppress it. Wherein consists your difficulty? Your private judgment once made public, and the world made acquainted with what you think and what you feel while you read me by the fireside, the business is done, I am reviewed, and my book forwarded in its progress by a judicious recommendation. In return, write a book, and I will be your reviewer; thus we may hold up each other to public admiration, and turn our friendship to good account. But, seriously, I think you perfectly qualified for the undertaking: and if you have no other objection to it than what arises from self-distrust, am persuaded you need only make the experiment in order to confute yourself.

We laughed heartily at your reply to little John's question; and yet I think you might have given him a direct answer—'There are various sorts of cleverness, my dear; I do not know that mine lies in the poetical way, but I can do ten times more towards the entertainment of company in the way of conversation than our friend at Olney. He can rhyme, and I can rattle. If he had my talent, and I had his, we should be too charming, and the world would almost adore us.'

<sup>1</sup> Johnson the bookseller had asked Unwin to review Cowper's book.

I have sowed salad, in hopes that you will eat it; I have already cut cucumbers, but have no fruit growing at present. Spring onions in abundance. We shall be happy to see you, and hope that nothing will intervene to shorten your stay with us. Our love is with you both, and with all your family.  
*Bon voyage!*—Yours,

Wm. COWPER.

If your short stay in town will afford you an opportunity, I should be glad if you would buy me a genteelish toothpick case. I shall not think half a guinea too much for it; only it must be one that will not easily break. If second-hand, perhaps, it may be the better.

TO JOSEPH HILL

April 1, 1782.

Recd. of Mr. Hill the sum of Forty pounds by  
draft upon Child and Co. Wm. COWPER.  
£40 : 0 : 0.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I shall be glad if my book might afford you any amusement in your journey. It is long; perhaps I am more agreeable in print than in person, more conversable at least I must be, for you and all that ever travelled with me know, that, though nowhere talkative, I have less to say upon the road than anywhere.

When I sent my book to the Chancellor, I meant no more by it than to pay him that respect I thought he had a right to. If it had procured me a line from him in return, I should have been pleased, perhaps, and flattered by the notice of so great a

man ; but my expectations went no further. I have nothing to ask because he has nothing to bestow that would suit me. I can even suppose it possible that though he must have received my book he may never read it ; and that by this time he may even have forgot that he has it in his possession. It is still more possible, perhaps, that if he reads it, he may not like it. There are not two men upon earth more opposite upon the subject of religion than his Lordship and myself, and my volume, whatever pains I may have taken to adorn it with character, or to enliven it with an air of cheerfulness, is at the bottom a religious business, a transcript of my own experience, and a summary of such truths as I know to be the most valuable in themselves, because the most important in their consequences. But they are such as men of his Lordship's principles have ever accounted foolishness, and will to the end of time. I have a favourable account of its progress from two different quarters, and am sanguine enough to hope that my Muse will not prove an expensive one to myself, if she should not prove a profitable one. I shall be glad to be able to take your advice, and produce a volume yearly ; but it depends upon circumstances not in my own power—health, spirits, and above all that indefinable disposition of mind that fits me for such an employment, which I do not always possess, and without which I can do nothing.

I heartily give you joy of your new acquisition ; may it prosper in your hands, and the trees you now plant receive you into their shade hereafter, free from the affairs of others and all anxieties of your own, with true wisdom in your head and true

peace in your heart, and if I could have framed a better wish for you, you should have had it. Mrs. Hill shares with you in it, to whom I beg my affectionate respects.—Yours affecty.,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN,  
AT THE REV. MATTHEW POWLEY'S, DEWSBURY, NEAR WAKEFIELD

April 27, 1782.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,—A part of Lord Harrington's new-raised corps have taken up their quarters at Olney since you left us. They have the regimental music with them. The men have been drawn up this morning upon the Market-hill, and a concert, such as we have not heard these many years, has been performed at no great distance from our window. Your mother and I both thrust our heads into the coldest east wind that ever blew in April, that we might hear them to greater advantage. The band acquitted themselves with taste and propriety, not *blairing*, like trumpeters at a fair, but producing gentle and elegant symphony, such as charmed our ears, and convinced us that no length of time can wear out a taste for harmony; and that though plays, balls, and masquerades have lost all their power to please us, and we should find them not only insipid but insupportable, yet sweet music is sure to find a corresponding faculty in the soul, a sensibility that lives to the last, which even religion itself does not extinguish. I must pity, therefore, some good people (at least some who once were thought such), who have been fiddled out of

all their Christian profession ; and having forsaken the world for a time, have danced into it again with all their might. It is a snare from which I myself should find it difficult to escape, were I much in the way of it.

When we objected to your coming for a single night, it was only in the way of argument, and in hopes to prevail with you to contrive a longer abode with us. But rather than not see you at all, we should be glad of you though but for an hour. If the paths should be clean enough, and we are able to walk (for you know we cannot ride), we will endeavour to meet you in Weston Park. But I mention no particular hour, that I may not lay you under a supposed obligation to be punctual, which might be difficult at the end of so long a journey. Only if the weather be favourable, you shall find us there in the evening. It is winter in the south, perhaps, therefore, it may be spring at least, if not summer, in the north ; for I have read that it is warmest in Greenland when it is coldest here. Be that as it may, we may hope at the latter end of such an April that the first change of wind will improve the season.

We truly sympathised with you in the distresses you found on the northern side of Wakefield. It is well that the fatigue and the fright together were not too much for Mrs. Unwin. What a boor was he you mention ! Cursed is he, says the Scripture, that turneth the blind out of his way—a curse that, for aught I know, is fierce enough to singe the beard at least of the wretch who refuses to turn the wanderer into it. You will probably preach at Dewsbury the last Sunday, and if you see this

dealer in light money, and this uncivilised savage in the congregation, perhaps you may contrive to tell him so.

The curate's simile Latinized :—

Sors adversa gerit stimulum, sed tendit et alas ;  
Pungit, api similis, sed, velut ista, fugit.

What a dignity there is in the Roman language ! and what an idea it gives us of the good sense and masculine mind of the people that spoke it ! The same thought which clothed in English seems childish, and even foolish, assumes a different air in Latin, and makes at least as good an epigram as some of Martial's.

I remember you making an observation, while here, on the subject of parentheses, to which I acceded without limitation ; but a little attention will convince us both that they are not to be universally condemned. When they abound, and when they are long, they both embarrass the sense, and are a proof that the writer's head is cloudy, that he has not properly arranged his matter, or is not well skilled in the graces of expression. But as parenthesis is ranked by grammarians among the figures of rhetoric, we may suppose they had a reason for conferring that honour upon it. Accordingly we shall find that in the use of some of our finest writers, as well as in the hands of the ancient poets and orators, it has a peculiar elegance, and imparts a beauty which the period would want without it.

'Hoc nemus, hunc,' inquit, 'frondoso vertice collum  
(Quis deus incertum est) habitat deus.'

VIR. *AEn.* 8.

In this instance, the first that occurred, it is graceful. I have not time to seek for more, nor room to insert them. But your own observation I believe will confirm my opinion. We have thought of you and talked of you every day since you went, and shall till you return. Our love attends yourself and Mrs. Unwin, John the hider of a tea-kettle not yet found, and your hosts at Dewsbury.—Yours ever,

W. C.

TO JOHN THORNTON<sup>1</sup>*Olney, May 21, 1782.*

DEAR SIR,—You have my sincere thanks for your obliging communication, both of my book to Dr. Franklin, and of his opinion of it to me. Some of the periodical critics I understand have spoken of it with contempt enough; but while gentlemen of taste and candour have more favourable thoughts of it, I see reason to be less concerned than I have been about their judgment, hastily formed, perhaps, and certainly not without prejudice against the subjects of which it treats.

Your friendly intimation of the Doctor's sentiments reached me very seasonably; just when in a fit of despondence, to which no man is naturally more inclined, I had begun to regret the publication of it, and had consequently resolved to write no more. For if a man has the fortune to please none but his friends and their connexions, he has reason enough to conclude that he is indebted for the measure of

<sup>1</sup> The Philanthropist: Cowper's 'John Thornton the Great.'

success he meets with, not to the real value of his book but to the partiality of the few that approve it. But I now feel myself differently affected towards my favourite employment; for which sudden change in my sentiments I may thank you and your correspondent in France. His entire unacquaintedness with me, a man whom he never saw nor will see, his character as a man of sense and erudition, and his acknowledged merit as an ingenious and elegant writer, and especially his having arrived at an age when men are not to be pleased they know not why, are so many circumstances that give a value to his commendations, and make them the most flattering a poor poet could receive, quite out of conceit with himself, and quite out of heart with his occupation.

If you think it worth your while when you write next to the Doctor to inform him how much he has encouraged me by his approbation, and to add my respects to him, you will oblige me still further, for next to the pleasure it would afford me to hear that it had been useful to any, I cannot have a greater, so far as my volume is in question, than to hear that it has pleased the judicious.

Mrs. Unwin desires me to add her respectful compliments.—I am, dear sir, your affectionate and most obedient humble servant,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*May 27, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Rather ashamed of having been at all dejected by the censure of the Critical

Reviewers,<sup>1</sup> who certainly could not read without prejudice a book replete with opinions and doctrines to which they cannot subscribe, I have at present no little occasion to keep a strict guard upon my vanity, lest it should be too much flattered by the following eulogium. I send it you for the reasons I gave when I imparted to you some other anecdotes of a similar kind, while we were together. Our interests in the success of this same volume are so closely united, that you must share with me in the praise or blame that attends it; and sympathising with me under the burthen of injurious treatment, have a right to enjoy with me the cordials I now and then receive, as I happen to meet with more favourable and candid judges.

A merchant, a friend of ours<sup>2</sup> (you will soon guess him), sent my Poems to one of the first philosophers, one of the most eminent literary characters, as well as one of the most important in the political world, that the present age can boast of. Now perhaps your conjecturing faculties are puzzled, and you begin to ask, ‘who, where, and what is he? speak out, for I am all impatience.’ I will not say a word more, the letter in which he returned his thanks for the present shall speak for him.

*Passy, May 8, 1782.*

SIR,—I received the letter you did me the honour of writing to me, and am much obliged by your kind present of a book. The relish for reading of poetry

<sup>1</sup> The *Critical Review* found Cowper’s verses ‘weak and languid’; with ‘neither novelty, spirit, or animation’; they were ‘flat and tedious,’ and ‘no better than a dull sermon,’ ‘coarse, vulgar, and unpoetical.’

<sup>2</sup> John Thornton.

had long since left me, but there is something so new in the manner, so easy, and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiments, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once. I beg you to accept my thankful acknowledgments, and to present my respects to the author.

I shall take care to forward the letters to America, and shall be glad of any other opportunity of doing what may be agreeable to you, being with great respect for your character,—Your most obedient humble servant,

B. FRANKLIN.

We may now treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, ‘Begone for a jackanapes, and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.’

We are glad that you are safe at home again. Could we see at one glance of the eye what is passing every day upon all the roads in the kingdom, how many are terrified and hurt, how many plundered and abused, we should indeed find reason enough to be thankful for journeys performed in safety, and for deliverance from dangers we are not perhaps even permitted to see. When in some of the high southern latitudes, and in a dark tempestuous night, a flash of lightning discovered to Captain Cook a vessel, which glanced along close by his side, and which, but for the lightning, he must have run foul of, both the danger and the transient light that showed it, were undoubtedly designed to convey to him this wholesome instruction, that a particular Providence

attended him, and that he was not only preserved from evils, of which he had notice, but from many more of which he had no information, or even the least suspicion. What unlikely contingencies may nevertheless take place! How improbable that two ships should dash against each other, in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean, and that steering contrary courses, from parts of the world so immensely distant from each other, they should yet move so exactly in a line as to clash, fill, and go to the bottom, in a sea where all the ships in the world might be so dispersed as that none should see another! Yet this must have happened but for the remarkable interference which he has recorded. The same Providence indeed might as easily have conducted them so wide of each other, that they should never have met at all; but then this lesson would have been lost; at least, the heroic voyager would have encompassed the globe without having had occasion to relate an incident that so naturally suggests it.

I am no more delighted with the season than you are. The absence of the sun, which has graced the spring with much less of his presence than he vouchsafed to the winter, has a very uncomfortable effect upon my frame. I feel an invincible aversion to employment, which I am yet constrained to fly to as my only remedy against something worse. If I do nothing, I am dejected; if I do anything, I am weary; and that weariness is best described by the word lassitude, which is of all weariness in the world the most oppressive. But enough of myself and the weather.

~~On board the ship in the West Indies<sup>1</sup> will,~~

Le Grasse, 12th April 1782.

2 H

I suppose, be decisive at least for the present year, and so far as that part of our possessions is concerned in the present conflict. But the news-writers, and their correspondents, disgust me, and make me sick. One victory after such a long series of adverse occurrences has filled them with self-conceit and impertinent boasting: and while Rodney is almost accounted a Methodist, for ascribing his success to Providence, men who have renounced all dependence upon such a friend, without whose assistance nothing can be done, threaten to drive the French out of the sea, laugh at the Spaniards, sneer at the Dutch, and are to carry the world before them. Our enemies are apt to brag, and we deride them for it; but we can sing as loud as they can, in the same key, and no doubt wherever our papers go, shall be derided in our turn. An Englishman's true glory should be, to do his business well, and say little about it; but he disgraces himself when he puffs his prowess as if he had finished his task, when he has but just begun it. We expect your sister in a day or two. We are both tolerably well, and our love attends you.—

Yours,

W.M. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

June 12, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Every extraordinary occurrence in our lives affords us an opportunity to learn, if we will, something more of our own hearts and tempers than we were before aware of. It is easy to promise ourselves beforehand, that our conduct shall be wise, or moderate, or resolute, on any given occa-

sion. But when that occasion occurs, we do not always find it easy to make good the promise: such a difference there is between theory and practice. Perhaps this is no new remark; but it is not a whit the worse for being old, if it be true.

Before I had published, I said to myself—You and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book. But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias; methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the *London Magazine*, and the *Gentleman's*, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow them. But the *Monthly Review*, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind.<sup>1</sup> What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait

<sup>1</sup> The *Monthly*, after long delay, gave a favourable review of Cowper's volume. It called him a poet 'sui generis,' 'his notes are peculiar to himself, he classes not with any known species of bards that have preceded him.' 'His religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humour an air that is religious.' 'His language is plain, forcible, and expressive.'

another month for his award. Alas ! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess at all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present perhaps think me one. Here is a carpenter, and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce, if those terrible critics show them the example. But oh ! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffiths,<sup>1</sup> let me pass for a genius at Olney !

I am glad that Mr. Madan is pleased, and obliged to him for his intercession with Dodsley : 'tis more than I expected. I wish he would publish something that I could approve of in return ; but if he does, it must be on some other subject. Had he given an answer, though but a specious one, to the criticisms of the *Monthly Review*, his perseverance would stand less in need of an excuse ; but having hitherto left unnoticed objections that strike at the very root of his project, though most provokingly challenged to refute them if he can, and still persisting in his design, he deserves less to be pitied as a man deceived, than blamed as an obstinate one. What is that quotation from Josephus, or how can it be applied to his purpose ? Does it prove that the converted Jews were polygamists ? No such matter ;

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Griffiths (1720-1803), who founded the *Monthly Review*, is principally remembered to-day by his relation with Oliver Goldsmith, who boarded and lodged in his house, and devoted himself to sub-editing the *Review*. Goldsmith declared that he was ill-treated and overworked.

it has therefore nothing to do with his argument. As little, in my mind, is he assisted by the remark he makes on the 19th of Matthew. ‘Christ did not condemn; therefore He approved:’ to which I reply, *non valet consequentia*: ten thousand enormities prevailed in His day, which He did not condemn by name, but He did not therefore authorise the least of them. And is it not a strange supposition that He should leave His disciples ignorant of what Mr. Madan accounts so great a privilege for eighteen centuries, and at last raise up the gentleman in question to restore it, and him so little qualified after all for the purpose, that he cannot support his doctrine? The Spirit was promised, and the Spirit in due time was given, to lead His disciples into all truth, and the history of the Christian Church proves, from the beginning to the present hour, that amongst other truths He has constantly taught them this: that it is unseemly for the followers of so holy a Master to allow themselves more wives than one, a custom for which nothing but the gratification of appetite can be honestly and fairly pleaded. The question is not, ‘Was polygamy lawful to a Jew?’ which nobody will dispute; but ‘Is it lawful to a Christian?’ Till he can prove the affirmative, towards which he has yet done nothing, he had better be quiet. He only disturbs the peace of families, puts the most valuable part of the sex to the torture, and disgraces himself.

We are sorry for little William’s illness. It is, however, the privilege of infancy to recover almost immediately what it has lost by sickness. We are sorry too for Mr. Thornton’s dangerous condition. But he that is well prepared for the great journey

cannot enter on it too soon for himself, though his friends will weep at his departure.

Your sister is well, and joins with me and your mother in affectionate remembrance of all at Stock.

We send you a cheese,  
In hopes it will please ;  
If so, your mother  
Will send you another.

—Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Wednesday, June, 1782.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am glad you have read the plan three times with great pleasure; it is a sign that you have pretty well overcome your fears about the execution of it; for fear hath torment, and is therefore incompatible with pleasure.

I would willingly send you the lines that proceed from the lips of my snuff-box, were it possible, but alas! they are no longer in being. I am a severer critic upon myself than you would imagine, and have the singular knack of being out of humour with every thing, or almost every thing I write, when it is about nine days old; accordingly I have used them—no matter how—but Bentley himself could not have treated them with more indignity.

I thank you for your kind remembrance of me, and wish always to live in your esteem and affection. I shall do so, no doubt, till you discover, as you will, that I have no right to either.

I would send Mr. —'s lines, but the letter is lost in a large bundle of others from the same hand, and I have not time to seek it. Whether it be what

I approve myself or not, or whatever it be, I promise you a copy of what I write next: and am, in the mean time, with Mrs. Unwin's and Mrs. Powley's best respects.—Yours,

W.M. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL

*Olney, June 22, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If reading verse be your delight,  
 'Tis mine as much, or more, to write;  
 But what we would, so weak is man,  
 Lies oft remote from what we can.  
 For instance, at this very time,  
 I feel a wish, by cheerful rhyme,  
 To soothe my friend, and, had I power,  
 To cheat him of an anxious hour;  
 Not meaning (for I must confess,  
 It were but folly to suppress),  
 His pleasure or his good alone,  
 But squinting partly at my own.  
 But though the sun is flaming high  
 I' th' centre of yon arch, the sky,  
 And he had once (and who but he ?)  
 The name for setting genius free,  
 Yet whether poets of past days  
 Yielded him undeserved praise,  
 And he by no uncommon lot  
 Was famed for virtues he had not;  
 Or whether, which is like enough,  
 His Highness may have taken huff,  
 So seldom sought with invocation,  
 Since it has been the reigning fashion  
 To disregard his inspiration,

I seem no brighter in my wits,  
 For all the radiance he emits,  
 Than if I saw through midnight vapour  
 The glimm'ring of a farthing taper.  
 O for a succedaneum, then,  
 T' accelerate a creeping pen,  
 O for a ready succedaneum,  
 Quod caput, cerebrum, et cranium,  
 Pondere liberet exoso,  
 Et morbo jam caliginoso !  
 'Tis here ; this oval box well fill'd  
 With best tobacco, finely mill'd,  
 Beats all Anticyra's<sup>1</sup> pretences  
 To disengage the encumber'd senses.

O nymph of Transatlantic fame,  
 Where'er thine haunt, whate'er thy name,  
 Whether reposing on the side  
 Of Oroonoquo's spacious tide,  
 Or list'ning with delight not small  
 To Niagara's distant fall,  
 'Tis thine to cherish and to feed  
 The pungent nose-refreshing weed,  
 Which, whether pulverised it gain  
 A speedy passage to the brain,  
 Or whether, touch'd with fire, it rise  
 In circling eddies to the skies,  
 Does thought more quicken and refine  
 Than all the breath of all the Nine—  
 Forgive the Bard, if Bard he be,  
 Who once too wantonly made free

<sup>1</sup> Anticyra, a town which produced hellebore—recommended as a cure for insanity.

To touch with a satiric wipe  
That symbol of thy power, the pipe ;  
So may no blight infest thy plains  
And no unseasonable rains ;  
And so may smiling peace once more  
Visit America's sad shore ;  
And thou, secure from all alarms,  
Of thundering drums and glittering arms,  
Rove unconfined beneath the shade  
Thy wide expanded leaves have made ;  
So may thy votaries increase,  
And fumigation never cease.  
May Newton with renew'd delights  
Perform thy odoriferous rites,  
While clouds of incense half divine  
Involve thy disappearing shrine ;  
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull  
Be always filling, never full.

## TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 3, [1782.]*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—We took leave of your sister at the George at Northampton on Wednesday evening last, having accompanied her thither in a chaise, with which we meant to have treated her, but found on our return that, in spite of all our precaution, she had contrived to discharge it. The Leeds coach took her up the next morning—I may properly say took her up, for it did not take her in; being full, it afforded her no place but on the roof. There, however, she found a well-behaved man, who promised to take care of her. This intelligence had

been communicated to us in a note from our late servant, who lives at Northampton, and who slept with her at the inn. We hope that by this time she is safe and sound at Dewsbury, it being agreed by all who ever made the experiment, that the top of the coach is the safest situation about it, being farthest removed from the point of joltation, as a philosopher would say, and consequently the least affected by it.

I neither congratulate nor condole with you on account of your late acquisition of Mr. Madan's acquaintance. You have no great cause to be proud of it; his smiles are not so valuable now as they might have been thought before he commenced an author. In that character he has lost the most desirable connections he had, and would have reason to think himself too happy if he could prevail with you to fill one of the vacant niches. He did not always court you as he does now, not because you were not always worthy of his attention, but because he was not always equally sensible of your value. The advantage, could he win you, would be all on his side; for which reason, I esteem it, as I said, no proper subject for congratulation; but then again, in consideration of your security, and because, although he angles for you very skilfully, you will not bite, I do not account it an occasion of any anxiety or concern. You are chiefly to be pitied for the disagreeable sensations to which a conduct such as you will find it necessary to observe must unavoidably expose you. It is painful to a generous mind, when solicited and assailed with expressions of a warm affection, to be obliged to make an inadequate return, and to strain

hard for a little show of civility, when cordiality seems to be called for. I can feel for you, because I know what I should feel in the same situation, and shall be glad to hear that you are handsomely rid of a business in which, though your prudence will guard you from being a loser, you have nothing to gain. I loved him once, but now I can only be sorry for him. Why will he kick against the thorns, and provoke a man so much his superior (if I have any judgment in the subject), both as a writer and a scholar, and especially as possessed of that ground of truth, virtue, good sense, and propriety, from which he cannot possibly be dislodged? Ignorance and impudence! Oh fie! the man is indisputably learned, and writes like a gentleman.

I enclose a letter from Lady Austen, which I beg you to return to me in your next. Her sister was the bearer of it. We are reconciled. She seized the first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection, and I, of course, am satisfied. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever. She stays at Clifton till after Christmas. Having been obliged to communicate our disagreement, I give myself a release from that obligation of secrecy under which I am engaged with respect to her other letters, accounting this, indeed, no part of our correspondence.

I ask pardon for neglecting a subject on which you consulted me in your last. It is too much my practice to reply to a letter without reading it at the time, and on this occasion my memory failed me. I am no friend to Lily's Grammar, though

I was indebted to him for my first introduction to the Latin language. The grammars used at Westminster, both for the Latin and the Greek, are those to which, if I had a young man to educate, I should give the preference. They have the merit of being compendious and perspicuous, in both which properties I judge Lily to be defective. If I am not mistaken, however, they are in use at the Charterhouse, so that I have no need to describe them to you. They are called Busby's Grammars, though Busby did not compose them. The compilation was a task imposed upon his uppermost boys, the plan only being drawn by the master, and the versification, which I have often admired for the ingenuity of it, being theirs. I never knew a boy of any abilities who had taken his notion of language from those grammars, that was not accurate to a degree that distinguished him from most others.

I am writing in the greenhouse for retirement sake, where I shiver with cold on this present third of July. Summer and winter, therefore, do not depend on the position of the sun with respect to the earth, but on His appointment Who is Sovereign in all things. Last Saturday night the cold was so severe that it pinched off many of the young shoots of our peach-trees. The nurseryman we deal with informs me that the wall-trees are almost everywhere cut off, and that a friend of his near London has lost all the full-grown fruit-trees of an extensive garden. The very walnuts, which are now no bigger than small hazel-nuts, drop to the ground; and the flowers, though they blow, seem to have lost their odours. I walked

with your mother yesterday in the garden, wrapped up in a winter surtout, and found myself not at all encumbered by it; not more, indeed, than I was in January. Cucumbers contract that spot which is seldom found upon them except late in the autumn, and melons hardly grow: it is a comfort, however, to reflect that if we cannot have these fruits in perfection, neither do we want them. Our crops of wheat are said to be very indifferent, the stalks of an unequal height, so that some of the ears are in danger of being smothered by the rest, and the ears in general lean and scanty. I never knew a summer in which we had not now and then a cold day to conflict with, but such a wintry fortnight as the last, at this season of the year, I never remember. I fear you have made a discovery of the webs you mentioned a day too late. The vermin have probably by this time left them, and may laugh at all human attempts to destroy them; for every web they have hung upon the trees and bushes this year, you will probably next year find fifty, perhaps a hundred: their increase is almost infinite; so that if Providence does not interfere, and man sees fit to neglect them, the laughers you mention may live to be sensible of their mistake. Love to all.—Yours,

Wm. COWPER.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

*July 16, 1782.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Though some people pretend to be very clever in the way of prophetical forecast,

and to have a peculiar talent of sagacity, by which they can divine the meaning of a providential dispensation while its consequences are yet in embryo, I do not. There is at this time to be found, I suppose, in the cabinet, and in both Houses, a greater assemblage of able men, both as speakers and counsellors, than ever were contemporary in the same land. A man not accustomed to trace the workings of Providence, as recorded in Scripture, and that has given no attention to this particular subject, while employed in the study of profane history, would assert boldly that it is a token for good, that much may be expected from them, and that the country, though heavily afflicted, is not yet to be despaired of, distinguished as she is by so many characters of the highest class. Thus he would say; and I do not deny that the event might justify his skill in prognostics. God works by means, and in a case of great national perplexity and distress, wisdom and political ability seem to be the only natural means of deliverance. But a mind more religiously inclined, and perhaps a little tinctured with melancholy, might with equal probability of success, hazard a conjecture directly opposite. Alas! what is the wisdom of man, especially when he trusts in it as the only God of his confidence. When I consider the general contempt that is poured upon all things sacred, the profusion, the dissipation, the knavish cunning of some, the rapacity of others, and the impenitence of all; I am rather inclined to fear that God, who honours Himself by bringing human glory to shame, and by disappointing the expectations of those whose trust is in creatures, has signalised the present day as a day of much human

sufficiency and strength, has brought together from all quarters of the land the most illustrious men to be found in it, only that he may prove the vanity of idols, and that when a great empire is falling, and he has pronounced a sentence of ruin against it, the inhabitants, be they weak or strong, wise or foolish, must fall with it. I am the rather confirmed in this persuasion, by observing that these luminaries of the state had no sooner fixed themselves in the political heaven, than the fall of the brightest of them shook all the rest. The arch of their power was no sooner struck than the keystone slipped out of its place ; those that were closest in connexion with it followed, and the whole building, new as it is, seems to be already a ruin. If a man should hold this language, who could convict him of absurdity ? The Marquis of Rockingham<sup>1</sup> is minister ; all the world rejoices, anticipating success in war, and the glorious peace. The Marquis of Rockingham is dead ; all the world is afflicted, and relapses into its former despondence. What does this prove, but that the Marquis was their Almighty, and that now he is gone, they know no other ? But let us wait a little, they will find another ; perhaps the Duke of Portland, or perhaps the unpopular Shelburne, whom they now represent as a devil, may obtain that honour. Thus God is forgot ; and when He is, His judgments are generally His remembrancers.

How shall I comfort you upon the subject of your present distress ? Pardon me that I find myself obliged to smile at it, because who but yourself

<sup>1</sup> He succeeded Lord North as Prime Minister in March 1782, but died 1st July the same year.

would be distressed upon such an occasion ? You have behaved politely, and like a gentleman ; you have hospitably offered your house to a stranger, who could not, in your neighbourhood at least, have been comfortably accommodated any where else. He, by neither refusing nor accepting an offer that did him too much honour, has disgraced himself, but not you. I think for the future you must be more cautious of laying yourself open to a stranger, and never again expose yourself to incivilities from an archdeacon you are not acquainted with.

Though I did not mention it, I felt with you what you suffered by the loss of Miss Ord. I was only silent because I could minister no consolation to you on such a subject, but what I knew your mind to be already stored with. Indeed, the application of comfort in such cases is a nice business, and perhaps when best managed might as well be let alone. I remember reading many years ago, a long treatise on the subject of consolation, written in French ; the author's name I forget, but I wrote these words on the margin :—‘Special consolation ! at least for a Frenchman, who is a creature the most easily comforted of any in the world !’

We are as happy in Lady Austen, and she in us, as ever ;—having a lively imagination, and being passionately desirous of consolidating all into one family (for she has taken her leave of London), she has just sprung a project which serves at least to amuse us, and to make us laugh ; it is, to hire Mr. Small's house,<sup>1</sup> on the top of Clifton-hill, which is large, commodious, and handsome, will hold us conveniently, and any friends who may occasionally

<sup>1</sup> Clifton Hall, now demolished.

favour us with a visit. The house is furnished; but, if it can be hired without the furniture, will let for a trifle. Your sentiments, if you please, upon this *démarche*!

The word *perhaps* in that passage of your letter, which relates to your correspondence with Mr. Madan, pleased me much. You say, *perhaps you may not write at all*; precisely the very conduct I would recommend to you. I have not seen his letters; but I have heard a character of them, and I dare say a just one. To disapprove them will be offensive, and not to mention them will be to disapprove them. How then can you avoid giving offence, unless you escape by *an archdeaconism*, and decline answering him at all. Indeed, indeed, in his present sentiments, however polite, entertaining, and sensible he may be, he is not a proper connexion for you. Your character is unblemished; permit me to say, keep it so,—and have nothing to do with *Thelyphthora* or its author.

I send you my last frank. Our best love attends you individually, and altogether. I give you joy of a happy change in the season, and myself also. I have filled four sides in less time than two would have cost me a week ago; such is the effect of sunshine upon such a butterfly as I am.—Yours affectionately,

W. C.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME

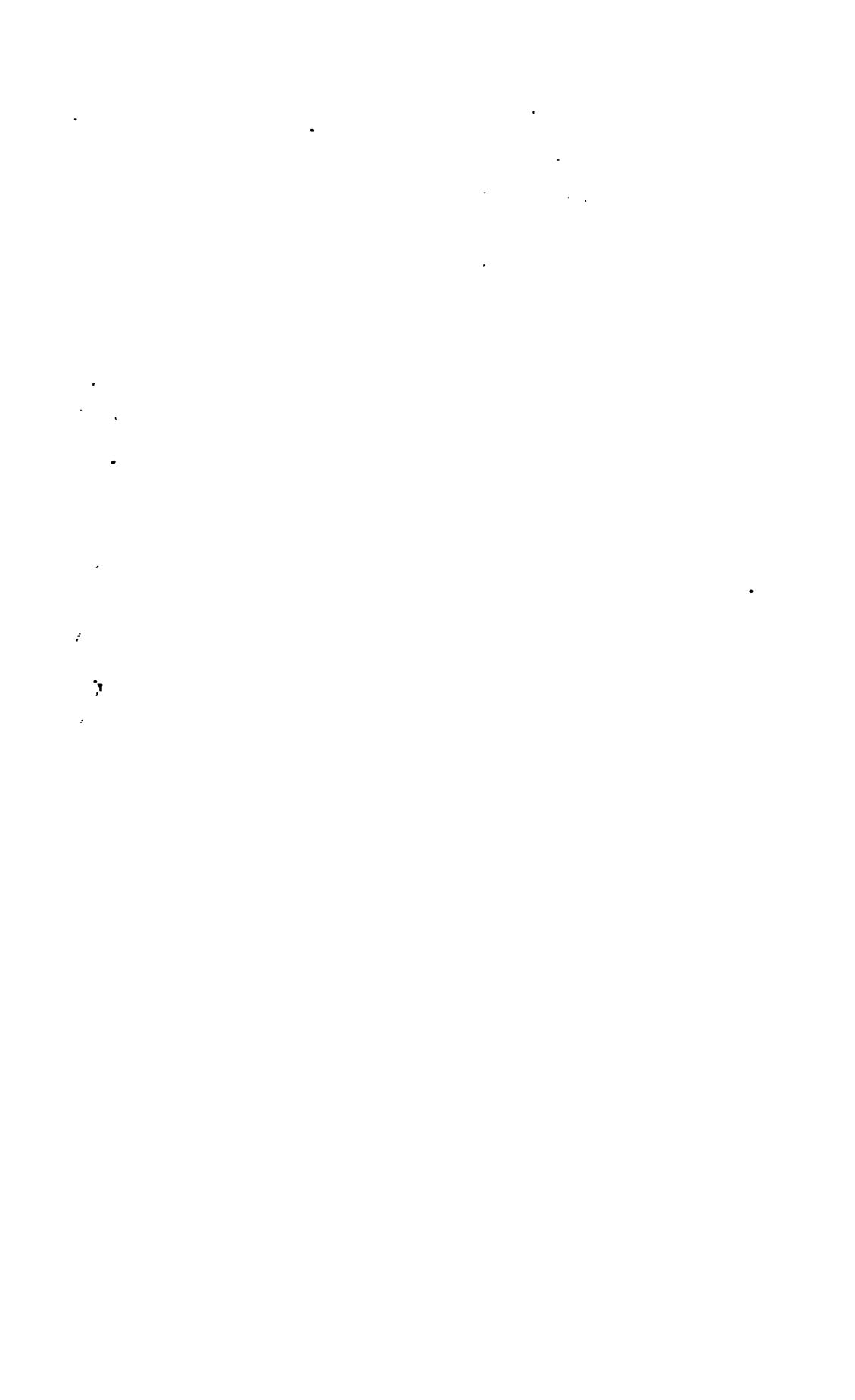
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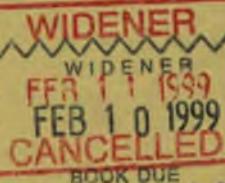
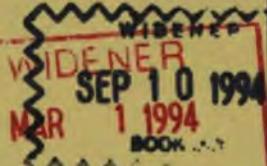




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